SAINT GREGORY THE GREAT

By
A SISTER OF NOTRE DAME

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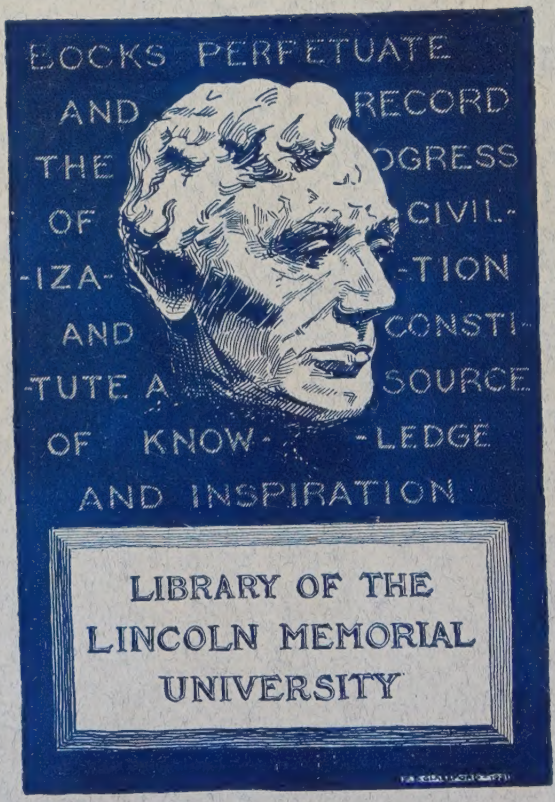
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THE TALBOT PRESS
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THE LIFE OF ST. GREGORY THE GREAT

Nihil Obstat:

GULIELMUS LANDERS,
Censor Theol. Deput.

Imprimi potest:

✠ EDUARDUS,
Archiep. Dublinensis
Hiberniæ Primas.

Dublini, die 22da Novembris,
1923.

Saint Gregory the Great.

The Life
of
St. Gregory the Great

BY

A SISTER OF NOTRE DAME

DUBLIN
THE TALBOT PRESS, LIMITED
TALBOT STREET
1924.

Lincoln Memorial University

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FOREWORD

BY THE ABBOT OF BUCKFAST

THE distinction between intellectual Catholicism and popular Catholicism has been made more than once in an invidious spirit of destructive criticism.

It has been said that the Catholicism of the crowd is something very different from the Catholicism offered to the intellectual élite.

We need not reject in principle this distinction; but there is no earthly reason for our opposing popular Catholicism to intellectual Catholicism. Christianity has indeed an immense attraction for what is best in man's intellect, but it has also a distinctly popular side. It is a life full of poetry and romance, replete with practical issues; it has all the charm of true myths without any errors; it is a religion which a whole people may make into a racial and national thing, in the true sense of the terms, with traditions and heroes and wonders and miracles far beyond the imagination of the ancient mythologies. If Catholicism be truly the presence of the Son of God amongst men, the marvellous, far from being the unusual and exceptional, ought to be the natural atmosphere in which a Catholic people has its being.

It has always seemed to me that St. Gregory the Great is the most perfect embodiment of that happy union of intellectual and popular

Christianity. St. Gregory is truly one of the Church's great Doctors, a worthy successor of St. Augustine of Hippo in the supremacy of mind.

St. Gregory's contribution to Christian theology is immense. But St. Gregory is also the author of the book of the Dialogues, that wonderful and fascinating compilation of the pious legends of his period. St. Gregory is the great administrator whose genius for ruling no man has ever doubted, yet he is best known to us as the teacher of sacred music, surrounded by juvenile choristers whom he initiates into the mysteries of ecclesiastical psalmody. The Holy Ghost, under the figure of a Dove, is perched on his shoulder in order to keep him from erring, not only in matters of Faith but also in matters of musical harmony.

The voluminous writings of St. Gregory, his vast epistolary activities, reveal to us a Catholicism both intellectual and popular, which has not changed since his day. In every page of the Dialogues, for instance, you find anecdotes which fit to a nicety into the Catholic life of an Italian village of our own day. We act, we pray, we believe, we fear, we hope, as did the Catholics all over the world in the days of St. Gregory. We say Masses for the dead, we expect the deliverance of souls from Purgatory, we believe in the miraculous, in small things and in great, as did the people who figure in St. Gregory's Dialogues. Our infidelities to grace and our shortcomings are the infidelities and shortcomings of monks and nuns and other good people who tried their best for the love of Christ in the

Italian towns and villages, of which St. Gregory makes such an elaborate and accurate enumeration. Many go straight to Heaven at death, in the days of St. Gregory, perhaps oftener than we dare to hope in our own days. Many there are who are seen in the flames of Purgatory asking for Masses and confessing the peccadilloes that made them unworthy of a speedy ascent to Heaven. St. Peter is seen assisting at the death bed of some favourite client of his, whilst on the other hand, some careless Catholic is frightened out of his wits by the presence of the old enemy when the last hour approaches. There are haunted houses, and houses full of angelic influences; there are miracles of the first magnitude, and there is divine intervention in favour of the Christian housewife whose hens are being stolen by a wily fox. In a word, St. Gregory's fertile pen portrays for us a complete, all-round, healthy Catholic life, such as the Middle Ages have known it, such as we love it ourselves. The background of all that multitudinous life of intensely practical Christianity is the monumental assertion of the intellectual truths of our Faith.

Anyone who makes us love St. Gregory the Great does our Faith a great service. The present well-written volume cannot fail to endear the great Pope to every reader. But we ought not to stop there: we ought to read St. Gregory himself. There are good English translations of large portions of his works. The Dialogues, for instance, are accessible to everyone. St. Gregory's charm is contagious. You seem to be living in the sixth century, and you feel that you have met

in your own lifetime the very class of people whom St. Gregory describes so well.

The great Pope was surrounded on all sides by the ruins of the Roman Empire; the Roman Eagle had lost "all its feathers." Gregory felt this great downfall most keenly, as he was a Roman of the Romans. Yet there is a constant vein of optimism in his view of things. There is a kind of playfulness of divine mercies which gives a charm even to such reprobate barbarians as Totila, king of the Goths. The heathen Barbarians were putting Catholic Italy to fire and sword; and Catholic Italy, full of faith in God's mercies, smiled at the Barbarians and converted them to the Faith of Gregory, the successor of Peter.

AUSCAR VONIER, O.S.B.

Abbot of Buckfast.

CHAPTER I

ROME IN HIS BOYHOOD.

SAINTS are always an interesting study. We ourselves are groping upward in the darkness towards the heights which they have scaled and kept; and we are fain to help our steps along the slippery crags by the footholds which their hands have carved. The interest intensifies when the saint we study is a man of action whom the world cannot even affect to despise, a man who has stamped his impress upon his time and upon our time, a man in whose writings we may read the story of his own soul, and learn things worth knowing of the men with whom he dealt.

Such a saint is Gregory, the great pope whom God gave to His Church in her need, at the close of the sixth century.

The men of his generation conceived of him as far and away their foremost man, his influence owned alike by Byzantine Emperor and Lombard lords, by Franks in Gaul and Visigoths in Spain. His firmness and forbearance stamped out heresy and schism in Vandal Africa. His letters followed his

missionaries to the coast of Kent, urging them to encourage whatever was harmless in the time-engrained customs of those heathens of good-will. Leave them, he advised, their beer feasts at Yuletide, and (in the form of good roast beef) the oxen fattened for the sacrifice. But, at the same time, lure them gently to the love of Christ by the story of the son of God, a Babe for their salvation and crying with cold in the manger at Bethlehem.

This was the secret of St. Gregory's power. Deep down in the heart of every man with whom he had to do, he saw some latent good and fostered it. And thus he roused the Romans round him to reorganise order out of chaos, and restore all things in Christ. And thus he tamed the German tribes, singling out what was best in their feudalism, and breathing into it the spirit of the Gospel. We cannot read aright his life, unless we have a clear idea of the world into which he was born.

Rome had long out-lived her palmy days. To the eyes of Gregory she sat on her Seven Hills a discrowned queen dying of old age. "In former years vigorous with youth, strong to multiply the race of men, but now, weighed down by the very weight of years, and hurried on by increasing maladies to the very brink of the grave." Elsewhere he applies to Rome the

words of the prophet to Judea: *Enlarge thy baldness as doth the eagle.* "Rome enlarges her baldness like the eagle, since in losing her people she has lost, as it were, all her plumage. The feathers have fallen even from the wings with which she used to swoop upon her victims. For all the mighty men are dead hy whom she made the world her prey." And into this decaying civilization swarmed the barbarians, jostling one another for their place in the sun.

When Constantine the Great removed the seat of empire from the Tiber to the Bosphorus, he meant his new capital to act as bulwark against the Persian king. But the real danger came, not from voluptuous Asia, but from the hardy race of tough fighters who dwelt amid the forest swamps and bleak uplands north of the Danube and east of the Rhine. Already in the second century Tacitus had warned his countrymen against the manly virtues of the Teuton. "The freedom of the Germans is the thing to dread, and not the despotism of the Persian King. Long may it endure and harden into a habit that, if they cannot love us they may at least go on hating one another. Fortune can give us nothing better than that our enemies disagree."

Even while Tacitus wrote, Rome was bargaining with the barbarians to fight her cam-

paigns. Soon her best legions were German mercenaries, officered by leaders of their own race and choice. And the legions, as we know, controlled politics in the West, selling the empire to the highest bidder, and murdering their puppet in the purple, when he would not or could not meet their demands. It was German meeting German, when in the fourth and fifth centuries hungry tribes migrated into the Empire, lured by "the goodness of the land and the nothingness of the people" and seeking shelter from the Slavs and Huns pressing on their rear.

The Franks, the most capable of assimilating civilization, merely crossed the Rhine and adopted the language and the religion of the conquered regions. Gaul lost nothing by the change of masters. This is the solitary instance in history of Germans fraternizing successfully with Celts and Latins. The Saxons, on the other hand, remained heathen. A few tribes sailed across the North Sea in the wake of the Angles and the Jutes. But the greater number filled up the gaps in the Fatherland left by Angles, Suabians. Lombards and Burgundians. They enlarged their frontiers also by settling in Alsace. The word Saxon is writ large to-day all over the map of Germany.

The other tribes headed South and in their

arrogance counted Christianity as part of their place in the sun. The Emperors had made the Arian heresy fashionable. The Arians had a code of morals far from rigorous and baptised their neophytes without probation. So Arians they all became.

At last the Empire of the West collapsed. In 476 the Herule Odoacer murdered the last of the imperial mannikins and proclaimed himself king of Italy. To avenge this crime, and at the same time to rid himself of troublesome neighbours, the Emperor of the East commissioned Theodoric the Ostrogoth to depose the usurper. Theodoric crossed the Alps with two hundred thousand of his countrymen, restored order, and assumed the title of king with the sullen acquiescence of the Court at Constantinople. This was in 493.

He fixed his capital at Pavia to keep in touch with the northern frontier, and for the thirty-three years of his reign the peninsula had peace. One third of the land was held by the Goths in military tenure. The natives kept their own laws, their own language, their own religion. At Rome the citizens had bread and games, the Senate was soothed with high-sounding titles, a public architect was salaried to keep in good repair the city aqueducts and monuments.

All went well while Theodoric lived. All

might have gone well after his death in 526 had the Goths been true to his daughter Amalasunth, had the Emperor Justinian dealt fairly with the unfortunate and gifted princess. But openly he proclaimed himself her protector, and secretly he schemed for her death. The rebels strangled her with her veil in 535, and the murder furnished the pretext for the campaigns in Italy of Justinian's generals, Belisarius and the exarch Narses.

Rome changed hands more than once during the four years fighting that followed. In 540, the year St. Gregory was born, the fields had lain fallow for two years. The people fed on acorns or starved to death on the open moor, and the very vultures turned in disdain from the fleshless corpses. The Greek garrison in the city included Moors, Huns, Persians and, of course, Germans. Military discipline was extremely lax, the imperial officers greedy of gain. The soldiers compounded for their worst offences by a money payment, and so robbery usually accompanied deeds of violence.

On the other hand, Totila, King of the Goths, gained everywhere the goodwill of the peasantry by his strict observance of the rules of war. He had his troops well under control. There was no lawlessness. Every deed of frightfulness was deliberately planned.

Towards the close of 545 Totila laid siege to Rome. Bessas, the imperial general, held the city with three thousand troops. A brave man was Bessas, but utterly callous to the sufferings of the poor. There was grain in the public granaries, but the market price of provisions rose with the pressure of famine, till even the wealthiest could scarce afford the price. A quarter of wheat sold for thirty pounds. Dogs, rats and cats were dainties difficult to buy. The poorer citizens lived on nettles which they cooked with care, to prevent the blistering of their lips and throats. The alms of the church, the whole income of the noble-hearted among the richer citizens served but as a drop in the ocean.

A mass meeting was held on the Palatine. The little Gregory could see it from his home on the Cœlian Hill. He could hear the famished howl of the desperate crowd :

" Feed us or kill us or allow us to leave Rome." But Bessas suffered none to depart unless they paid him well .

Belisarius made valiant attempts to raise the siege. With the few troops at his command he forced Totila's position on the Tiber. Bessas, however, failed to assist him by a sally. Perhaps he could not. His garrison was on short rations ; the civilians refused to man the walls ;

the sentries, if they chose, slept at their posts for the officers no longer went their rounds. At length on the 17th of December 546, four Isaurian soldiers turned traitor and admitted the enemy. And as Totila marched his men in by one gate, Bessas fled for his life by another. He had not even time to remove or hide his ill-gotten hoard. The remnant of his horsemen rode hard at his heels.

The Goths paced slowly through a network of deserted streets—the silence unbroken, save for their own shouts and blare of trumpets, or by the occasional shriek of some agonizing citizen whom they dragged from his hiding hole and killed. Totila gave stern orders that no woman should suffer hurt or insult. Nor did he approve of indiscriminate slaughter. Only the senators and the leading citizens did he doom to death.

These unfortunates with their families sought sanctuary in St. Peter's great basilica. Was the Senator Gordianus one of those who knelt round the tomb of the Prince of the Apostles? And did his little son, Gregory, lift up his innocent voice in prayer? The boy was seven years of age, quite old enough to understand what was going on.

A copy of the Gospels in his hand, the Archdeacon Pelagius stood forth, to speak Totila fair.

" God hath made us your subjects," he told him, " and as your subjects we have a right to be dealt with in mercy."

Totila left them their lives, but sent them to fortresses in the Campagna. The few hundred citizens who survived the siege were also ordered out of Rome. The deserted city was given over to pillage, some buildings were set on fire, a third of the circuit of its walls destroyed. It was rumoured that the Gothic king meant to turn the capital of Christendom into a sheep-walk.

The rumour reached Belisarius on his sick-bed, and he wrote in protest to Totila :

" If you win the war, Rome will be the fairest jewel in your crown. If you lose, Rome spared will plead your cause."

Totila stayed the destruction and withdrew his troops. He came back in 549 to find corn-fields waving in the city squares. This time he laid himself out to win hearts—issued orders for rebuilding, gave a chariot race in the Circus Maximus at his own expense, and invited all the exiles to return.

Most of the senators accepted ; for Rome was now the safest place for a Roman noble. The scene of the war had shifted, first to Sicily then to Sardinia, and the fame of Totila's victories at last roused the Emperor to effective action.

The chief command at Ravenna was given to Narses, a puny little man with brains, who knew Italy well, both land and people. Moreover he was an orthodox Catholic, popular with the soldiers. and had the name of being the only minister who could get from Justinian all the money he asked for.

A great battle took place in 552. Six thousand Goths lay dead on the field, and Totila mortally wounded was borne away to die. Within a month his blood-stained tunic and his jewelled helmet were laid at the Emperor's feet. Within the twelvemonth the Ostrogoths as a nation disappeared from history.

Certain Greeks, who love to belittle their own great men by praising the enemy, write highly of Totila and cite traits of his chivalry and largesse. Even St. Gregory, who looked upon him as "always evilly disposed" admits in his *Dialogues* that "he was not so cruel as before he had been" after his visit to Monte Cassino in 542, when the great St. Benedict foretold to him the things which afterwards came to pass.

"Much evil dost thou do, much evil hast thou done," said the abbot to the king. "Refrain thyself now from unrighteousness. Thou shalt enter Rome. Thou shalt cross the

sea. Nine years shalt thou reign, in the tenth thou shalt die."

Later the man of God told the Bishop of Canossa, who came to him for comfort amid the tribulations affecting the Church :

" Rome shall not be utterly destroyed by strangers, but shall be so shaken with storms and lightnings and earthquakes that it will fall to decay of itself."

St. Gregory, who had the incident third hand, adds his comment. " The mystery of this prophecy we now behold clear as day."

The Rome of the Cæsars was indeed, in his boyhood, mouldering away. There was still a senate, with duties dwindled to the regulation of weights and measures. But the sea and two mountainous peninsulas divided the city from the seat of empire. Rome now paid her taxes to Justinian at Constantinople. She was not even at the head of the Italian province but took her orders from Ravenna on the Adriatic coast.

From his father's house on the western escarpment of the Cœlian Hill, the boy Gregory could look across the Appian way to the mass of ruins covering the Palatine. In the reign of Augustus the élite of Rome lived on this hill in marble mansions, " each one huge enough to be a city in itself." Goth and Hun and

Vandal had made but small impression on their solid masonry. But only a handful of buildings was in good repair—just enough to house the imperial officials, and the exarch from Ravenna when business brought him to Rome. All around, and elsewhere on the Seven Hills, the ground lay strewn with broken marble and mosaics, and headless statues carelessly toppled over when the pedestals were rifled of their bronze.

It was the Romans themselves who mutilated their monuments and took from public buildings and deserted temples wherewith to mend and reconstruct their own abodes. The houses were now huddled in the lower parts of the city. It was difficult to get water on the heights since the grand old aqueducts had been suffered to fall out of repair. Malaria was chronic in the pestilential swamps thus engendered, and the Campagna had become a wilderness, with the broken lines of aqueduct arches and the charred remains of buildings to tell of the glories and prosperity of bygone days.

But Gregory's home stood on a healthy height, the Clivus Scaurus or western escarpment of the Cœlian Hill, where now stands the church and monastery of San Gregorio. There was never a shortage of water in his

father's mansion. The great fountain in the *atrium* was, according to legend, the very fountain where the nymph Egeria gave lessons to King Numa on law and religion. In the Middle Ages it was to be a holy well, where halt and blind and sick of divers diseases would come to drink, and to kneel in thanksgiving or silent petition before the portrait of the sainted pontiff on the wall hard by.

From the steps of the colonnade which let in air and light to the windowless atrium, the boy Gregory could see below him to the southwest the Thermæ Caracallæ where once sixteen hundred bathers lounged through the day. The roof was still intact, the painted ceilings beautiful. But the huge swimming bath had long ago run dry, weeds were sprouting through the mosaics on the untrodden pavement, spiders wove their webs across the faces of the marble gods. He may have played here as an infant, under the watchful eye of his nurse, Dominica. As a schoolboy he may have sought here, sometimes, a quiet nook, sheltered from the sun, where he might con the morrow's task.

Outside the Thermae ran the Appian Way, the queen of long roads. Gregory must often have walked along its perfect pavement of smoothly jointed stones; for the Roman

section of the Via Appia skirted the bases of the Cœlian and Palatine Hills, before merging in the Via Sacra a little to the north of the Coliseum.

The Coliseum, too, was in good repair: no breaches then in the huge weather-beaten mass of masonry. It was still used for acrobatic displays and the feats of performing animals. But the gladiators had fought their last fight in 404. Beast-baitings, too, had ceased. The citizens had no longer the opportunity to applaud indecencies on the very spot where their forefathers had died for Christ. Somehow we cannot picture the boy Gregory as ever seeking amusement in the shows of the Coliseum.

Pagan Rome was mouldering away. Deserted and dilapidated, shunned as the haunts of evil spirits stood the stately temples which erstwhile made its glory. The small bronze shrine of Janus in the Forum still contained the image of the two-faced god; but some fanatic had wrenched its gates apart from their hinges during the Gothic war.

Hard by, on the Via Sacra, Pope Felix IV had thrown into one two small temples to form the Church of Saints Cosmas and Damian. Here the boy Gregory may often have lingered, drinking in the lessons of its storied mosaics.

All through life he loved to see the walls of churches covered with holy pictures, " books of the unlettered " he calls them in a letter to Serenus, Bishop of Marseilles :

" Exhort your people to acquire the fervour of compunction by gazing on these historic scenes while they bend the knee adoringly before the Holy Trinity."

He liked too the idea of transforming heathen temples into places of Christian worship, and suggested it to his English missionaries. After his death such conversions became popular on the banks of the Tiber. The Pantheon began the series in 609 when Boniface IV consecrated it to the honour of Our Lady and all the martyrs. But in St. Gregory's lifetime Saints Cosmas and Damian was the solitary instance in Rome.

There were churches in plenty—ugly outside, devotional and aglow with colour and gilding within. Classic monuments had contributed piecemeal to their structure. Thus the pavement in St. Paul's Without-the-Walls was a patchwork of nine hundred inscriptions. In St. Peter's-on-the-Vatican, the ninety-two great pillars had capitals and bases which did not match. The columns of Grecian marble in St. Peter's *ad Vincula* had once adorned the Thermae of Titus and of Trojan.

Only one church could rank as a work of art,

" the Golden Basilica," which Constantine had built near the Lateran palace of the popes to be " the mother and mistress of all the churches in the city and in the world."

Yet, even in the sixth century, the Catholic world recognized as its real centre, not the fair church of St. John Lateran, but that other basilica built by Constantine " above the body of Blessed Peter." Here Theodoric the great Goth, albeit an Arian, " worshipped with the deep devotion of a Catholic," and left his offering, two silver candelabra, seventy pounds in weight. Hither, as ex-voto for his victories, Belisarius brought two silver-gilt candelabra and a golden cross adorned with gems. Hither from time to time the emperors sent pledges of their communion with the Throne of the Fisherman ; costly tapestries, jewelled altar vessels and vases of gold and silver, illuminated gospels in rich bindings encrusted with gems. Nor must we forget St. Gregory's own tablet, enumerating the estates which he allotted for the upkeep of the lamps.

St. Peter's holds a more sacred memorial of this great pope. For " When he departed," says Bede, " to the true life where the reward of his labours shall never die, his body was buried in the church of St. Peter the Apostle,

before the sacristy." The greater portion of his relics were translated in 1606 to the Clementine chapel within the same basilica.

But fully to satisfy our devotion towards the saint, we must turn our backs on the Vatican and go—as Gregory so often went in life—along the Via Triumphalis which links St. Peter's with the Lateran palace. And, a little before the road ends in the Piazza San Giovanni, we turn aside up the Avenue San Gregorio which leads to the church and monastery of that name.

In the church we venerate a reliquary containing an arm of our saint, his ivory crozier, his marble chair, the recess where he slept, the picture of Our Lady before which he was wont to pray, the marble table with antique supports where once he entertained an angel unawares, the arm of St. Andrew which he brought home to his monks from Constantinople, his statue designed by Michael Angelo but finished by another hand, and frescoes treating of St. Augustine's mission to the English.

The circerone taps the walls and buttresses of the church, and tells the pilgrims that they date from St. Gregory's time. And so they do. For when the building was reconstructed in the seventeenth century as much as possible of the old material was used, and the architect

copied, as accurately as he could, the church erected during the pontificate of this great pope, and which he consecrated in honour of St. Andrew close to the monastery where he himself had lived so many years in holy peace.

The monastery, too, has been rebuilt. A few Benedictines of the Camaldolese congregation are still tolerated here as caretakers of the church. But the Italian Government took over the premises in 1870 and assigned the larger portion as an almshouse for old women.

Centuries have altered the ground level of the Cœlian Hill. Yet experts have reason to believe that, beneath the cellars of the monastery, the old Roman mansion, where St. Gregory was born, exists still in good repair and could be excavated without danger or injury to the buildings overhead.

It was still above ground in 872 and the monks in possession for three hundred years, when John the Deacon paid his memorable visit and described the three portraits in the atrium : Gordianus, Sylvia and their illustrious son.

CHAPTER II

A GOODLY INHERITANCE.

GORDIANUS, our saint's father, was a grave, tall, long-faced man with short beard and bushy hair. He wears in his picture a bright brown *planeta*, suggestive somewhat of a chasuble, and stands clasping the hand of the Apostle, St. Peter, in token that he held office under the pope. Indeed, he was responsible for the law business, upkeep of churches and care of the poor in one of the seven regions of Rome.

He came of an ancient and respected line, the Gens Anicia which was famous, says St. Austin of Hippo, for the many consuls it gave the State, for the many virgins it gave the Church. To this family belonged the first Christian senator, the pope St. Felix III, Boëthius, "the last of the Romans whom Cato and Cicero could acknowledge as their fellow-citizen," and St. Benedict, the great patriarch of the monks of the west.

Gordianus was a wealthy man. He owned large estates in Sicily and may often have taken his family there for the summer months.

But the formative years of Gregory's boyhood were mostly spent in Rome.

Of this interesting period there is little on record. His talents, like his father's, seem to have been of a practical order. Natural eloquence and will power gave promise of a distinguished career. Paul the Deacon, his earliest biographer, speaks of his sound judgment, as a boy, of his reverence for his teachers, of his tenacious memory.

"If he chanced to hear what was worth remembering, he did not sluggishly let it pass into oblivion. In those days he drew into a thirsty breast streams of learning, which, afterwards, at the fitting time he poured forth in honeyed words."

From his mother, Sylvia, he learned to be tender as well as strong. Her portrait shows a dignified, pleasant-looking matron, still comely albeit wrinkled with age. Her right hand is uplifted to make the sign of the cross. In her left hand she holds a psalter open at her favourite text: "Let my soul live and it shall please Thee, and let Thy judgment help me."

Sylvia inspired her son with her own love for Holy Scripture. He mastered the sacred text so thoroughly in youth that afterwards he could quote it readily, and bring it to bear on whatsoever topic he treated.

St. Gregory has been blamed for using words unknown to classic writers. Be it remembered that when he wrote, Latin was a living language, subject to change. He could not find in Cicero's vocabulary words to express ideas that were far above Cicero's plane. He certainly did not write the Latin of Cicero or even of Tacitus. But he contributed as much as any Father of the Church to form the new Latin, the Christian Latin which was to become the language of the pulpit and of the schools.

He could always clothe his thought in words which made his meaning unmistakable, but he was at no pains to cultivate elegance of diction. He says himself that his letters abound in uncouth phrases, that his too frequent use of words ending in *m* grates upon the ear, that his faults are flagrant as regards prepositions. He ends his list of shortcomings with the jesting avowal:

"I consider it extremely unbecoming to hamper the flow of heavenly utterance by too rigid attention to the rules of grammarians."

He was prone to deride the preacher "wordy in superfluities, mute in necessaries."

In his *Dialogues*, and still more fully in his homilies, St. Gregory tells the story of his father's three sisters, Tarsilla, Emiliana and

Gordiana, who had consecrated their virginity to God, and lived at home, as much apart from the world as in a convent, dividing their time between prayer and good works, and exhorting one another to virtue by word and by example.

Sometimes Tarsilla said sadly to Emiliana: "Methinks our sister, Gordiana, is not as we are. I fear that in her heart she does not keep to what she has promised."

Then would they sweetly chide Gordiana. And she would listen gravely and with downcast eyes, but soon again returned to trifling jests, and sought the company of worldly girls. And the time not given to diversions seemed to her tedious.

Tarsilla died on Christmas Eve. St. Gregory tells us the manner of her death.

"To this holy woman, my great grandfather, Felix, sometime Bishop of Rome, appeared in vision. 'Come' said he, 'I will entertain thee in my home of light." Soon afterwards she fell ill of an ague, and many friends stood round her bed, as is the custom when noble folk lie dying. Suddenly she fixed her gaze on high. 'Away, away!' she cried, 'Make room, my Saviour Jesus comes!' And as she leaned forward to meet the Bridegroom, her holy soul was freed from the flesh and a wonderful

fragrance filled the room, so that my mother and the others present knew that the Author of all sweetness had been there."

A few nights later, Tarsilla appeared to Emiliana in her sleep.

"Come," she said joyfully, "I have kept our Lord's Birthday without thee, but we shall be together for the Epiphany."

"If I come," said Emiliana, "who will take care of our sister?"

"Come thou," Tarsilla repeated, "our sister Gordiana is reckoned among the women of the world."

"My aunt Gordiana increased her waywardness," St. Gregory goes on, "and what before was hidden in the desire of her mind she now translated into evil act. Unmindful of the fear of God, unmindful of modesty and reverence, unmindful of her vow of virginity, she married, after a time, the steward of her estates."

Could this be the "Aunt Pateria" who was living in the Campagna in straitened circumstances when Gregory became pope? In the first year of his pontificate he orders his local agent to give her forty measures of wheat, as well as money "to buy boots for her boys." Pateria may well be a clerical slip for *paterna* "on the father's side."

Gordianus destined his son for the bar, so Gregory naturally focussed his studies on Roman and Canon Law. "In the city he was second to none for skill in grammar, dialectics and rhetoric." And despite keen competition on the part of state-aided Constantinople, the Rome of that era still attracted students in theology, law and medicine. Cassiodorus, the cultured statesman turned monk, could write:

"Whereas other districts trade in oil and balm and in aromatics, Rome still distributes to the world the gift of eloquence; and we find it inexpressibly sweet to listen to the men whom she has trained."

Strange to say St. Gregory never troubled to learn Greek, even when in manhood he spent six years in Constantinople, with plenty of leisure on his hands. And thus the wealth of sacred learning in the writings of the Eastern Fathers remained for him locked and sealed. One wonders how Gordianus could have let him grow up ignorant of a language as indispensable to a Roman gentleman in the sixth century as French is to an English one nowadays. It may well be that both father and son resented the secondary position which Rome now held in politics. This neglect of Greek, moreover, points to a lack of wordly ambition.

The boy's aim, as he grew to manhood, was to serve his fellow-citizens, as his father served them, in the pope's employ.

The pope was undoubtedly the great man in Rome, his political position in Italy strengthened by the Emperor Justinian's Pragmatic Sanction of the Ides of August, 554. "Let produce be furnished," thus ran the decree, "let money be received in taxes, according to those weights and measures which Our Piety now entrusteth to the safe keeping of the Most Blessed Pope and the Most Honourable Senate."

Like other Italian bishops, the pope was allowed due weight in the selection of "fit and proper persons to carry on the local government." The Viceroy (exarch) stationed at Ravenna usually allowed him a free hand. The few subordinates in the Government offices on the Palatine did not seriously interfere with his arrangements for the good administration of Rome.

The popes accepted the circumstances and rendered faithfully to Cæsar the things he claimed, when this claim did not clash with the higher duty owed to God. Each pope at his accession paid in coin of tribute three thousand gold pieces, just six times as much as an ordinary bishop; and the emperor, as

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chief patrician, was asked to ratify the choice of the clergy and people of Rome.

Vigilius, who was pope when St. Gregory was born, had represented the Holy See at the court of Justinian during five consecutive pontificates. He had a difficult course to steer at Constantinople, amid simony, intrigue and heresy under a plausible mask. Justinian, himself, was orthodox in faith. But his wife, the Empress Theodora, would fain have men forget her past lapses in the days when she was known as Athenaïs, the star of the Byzantine comic stage. And so she dabbled and domineered in church affairs and "clung to the Monophysite creed as if it were some new form of sensual gratification."

The Monophysites, who denied Our Lord's Human Nature, had been formally condemned at the fourth General Council of the Church, held at Chalcedon in 451. Three of the bishops at Chalcedon had written formally on the side of Nestorius, and the Monophysites fastened on this fact as a pretext for questioning the validity of the decrees of the Council. Thus began the schism known in history as *The Three Chapters*, a schism long drawn out, which St. Gregory's best efforts failed to heal.

Justinian's Edict of Comprehension forbade the topic to be discussed, and Theodora in-

truded Anthymus, a dissembling Monophysite, into the See of Constantinople. Pope St. Agapetus, when business brought him to court, unmasked the heretic, deposed and excommunicated him. And Justinian, a moment led astray by anger, knelt spontaneously to ask the pope's forgiveness.

But Theodora hardened her heart. On the death of St. Agapetus she wrote imperiously to the new pope:

"Delay not to come to us; or at least restore Anthymus to his see."

Pope St. Silverius groaned aloud when he read this letter, "I know this affair will be my death."

Nevertheless, putting his trust in God and St. Peter, he refused point blank to hold communion with Anthymus. And the empress set up Vigilius as anti-pope, imprisoned Sylverius, and starved him to death, before Justinian could intervene.

Vigilius went to Rome and was canonically elected pope. He wrote immediately to Theodora:

"We have spoken wrongly, senselessly. Now we will not do what you require. We will not recall an anathematized heretic."

Summoned in his turn to Constantinople, he went. He condemned *The Three Chapters*

"without prejudice to the Council of Chalcedon." He refused to preside at a council to which the Western bishops were not summoned. He would not admit that the emperor had a right to dictate to the Church. After eight years struggle he was allowed to return to Rome, but died in Sicily on the homeward journey (555).

Gregory, at that date, was a boy of fifteen, old enough to take a keen interest in the riots which took place in Rome, when Pelagius came before the electors as the emperor's nominee.

Pelagius was an able and a holy man, and Roman to the core. As archdeacon of St. Peter's he had endeared himself to the citizens by open-handed almsgiving in the lean years of famine, he had earned the gratitude of the senators by his bold front against Totila in 546. But these things had slipped from memory during the years of absence which he spent, safeguarding the interests of the Romans as papal agent (apocrisarius) at the court of Justinian. Calumny made itself busy with his name. He had bought his appointment, it was whispered, he had had a hand in the death of Vigilius.

However, the memory of his bygone benevolence stirred enough hearts among the notables to secure him the number of votes required by

Canon Law. But only two bishops were found willing to officiate at his consecration, the Archpriest of Ostia had to do duty as the third.

Narses, the exarch, came up from Ravenna with his troops to keep order in the city, and rode with the new Pope to the Church of St. Pancras, whom the Romans regarded as the avenger of perjury. Here, his hand on the martyr's relics, Pelagius swore he was innocent of the charges brought against him. Then the procession passed on to St. Peter's and seated on his throne, the new Pope preached to the people on the sin of simony, and proclaimed his intention of cleansing the Church from its foulness. He kept his word.

In 565 the Emperor Justinian died. A little later Narses was recalled in disgrace. Then the Lombards gained a footing in Italy and all was frightfulness again. In 572 Monte Cassino was raided and the monks dispersed. The marauders infested the Campagna and brought the Romans to the brink of starvation.

We have no details as to the part played by Gregory amid these stirring events. He helped his father in his regionary duties, and succeeded him in office when the death of Gordianus left him one of the wealthiest men in

Rome. His widowed mother retired to a hermitage near St. Paul's Without-the-Walls, to spend the remainder of her life in prayer, good works and pious reading. Her son endowed the basilica to which she attached herself with a yearly grant of oil and wax.

We know he was chief magistrate in Rome at the age of thirty-three. His signature, in this capacity, heads the list of Romans who pledged themselves in 574 to uphold the Fifth General Council of Constantinople. For the Popes recognised this Council as œcumenical, with the proviso "that the decrees of the Council of Chalcedon might in no wise be impugned."

This was Gregory's first contribution to the controversy of *The Three Chapters*, a fight over nothing, so it seems to us now, nevertheless it proved an irritating thorn to St. Gregory all through his career. We shall not refer again to the "very useful letters" which as papal secretary and as pope he wrote to hinder schism from hardening in the Churches of Milan and Istria. The verdict of history has long ago approved the sensible attitude which the Holy See adopted from first to last.

As Prefect of Rome Gregory could now wear the *trabea* of the Consuls, a rich robe of silk, magnificently embroidered and spark-

ling with gems. Impartial, gracious, open-handed, he soon won his way into the hearts of the citizens, who vented their enthusiasm in cheers whenever he appeared in the streets.

But Gregory shrank from plaudits. The responsibilities outweighed, in his mind, the dignity of his position. He made time to spend long hours in prayer. He courted the friendship of holy monks. There were about twenty monasteries in Rome at the time, and many homeless monks sought refuge within the circuit of the city walls when the Lombards laid waste the Campagna.

Gregory had already founded six monasteries on his lands in Sicily. He now turned his house at Rome into a seventh in honour of the Apostle St. Andrew. Here he, himself, took the habit in the year 575.

The atrium—the great windowless hall with its colonnaded portico and its fountain—remained much as he remembered it in childhood. Here were the portraits of his beloved parents. And here in a small apse within a a ring of stucco, as John the Deacon tells us, our saint after he became Pope, "wisely wished his own likeness to be painted, that he might be frequently seen by his monks as a reminder of his known severity."

John's description of this picture may fitly

close this chapter. We cannot better Dudden's translation of it in his *Gregory the Great.*

"His face was well proportioned, combining the length of his father's and the roundness of his mother's countenance; his beard, like his father's, was somewhat tawny and sparse. His head was large and bald, surrounded with dark hair hanging down below the middle of the ear; two little curls bending towards the right crowned a forehead broad and high. The eyes were of a yellow-brown colour, small but open; the eyebrows arched, long and thin; the under eye-lids full. The nose was aquiline with open nostrils. The lips were red and thick, the cheeks shapely, the chin prominent and well formed. His complexion, swarthy and high-coloured, became flushed in later life. The expression was gentle. He was of medium height and good figure; his hands were beautiful, with tapering fingers well adapted to handle the pen of a ready writer. In the picture he was represented as standing, clad in a chestnut coloured chasuble over a dalmatic, and wearing a small pallium which fell over his shoulders, breast and side. His left hand grasped a book of the Gospels, his right was raised to make the sign of the Cross. A square frame, not the round nimbus, surrounded his head, proving that the portrait was executed during his life-

time. Beneath the picture was the following distich of his own composing :

"Christe, potens Domine, nostri largitor honoris,
Indultum officium solita pietate guberna."

CHAPTER III

MONK AND BUSINESS MAN

ST. BENEDICT'S " tiny rule suited for beginners " had stood the test of sixty years before it won St. Gregory's praise as " marvellously discreet and clear." It was framed originally for men " wisely unlearned" like their founder, who had fled from the haunts of men to build their monasteries in the wilderness and eat their bread in the sweat of their brow. Obviously, it had to be somewhat modified to suit the circumstances of St. Andrew's, a monastery well endowed and established in the heart of Rome. Six hours a day of manual toil was too much, two hours of study not enough.

But the main principles of the Benedictine Order remained intact.

At St. Andrew's, as at Monte Cassino, a postulant of mature age was kept knocking at the gate for some days to try his perseverance. Then he was admitted to the guest house and after some days, to the noviciate. Here an old monk, skilled in the art of training souls, studied his vocation and character, and warned

him of the difficulties and discomforts in the hard path of obedience. Three times the whole rule was read in his presence, and the question formally put :

" It thou canst observe it, enter. If thou canst not, *liber discede*, thou art free to depart."

At St. Andrew's, as at Monte Cassino, the monks had " to obey without delay." St. Benedict wrote in his rule : " For the preservation of peace and charity, it is expedient that the entire government of the monastery depend upon the will of the abbot. Furthermore, the brethren shall obey one another, knowing that by this path of obedience they shall go to God."

To foster the habit of prompt, uncomplaining obedience, great stress was laid on the twelve degrees of humility by which, says St. Benedict, " the monk will gradually ascend to that perfect love of God which casteth out fear, so that whatsoever in the beginning he forced himself to observe, he shall at length do without effort, not now through fear of hell, but for the love of Christ, out of a good custom and a delight in virtue."

St. Andrew's, like Monte Cassino, was a " Castle of God " where the monks clad in the armour of obedience, enlisted under the

standard of Christ for strenuous service of labour and prayer.

Divine worship was their principal duty—*Opus Dei* St. Benedict calls it, "the work of God to which all other work must be subordinated." The days and nights were parcelled out into liturgical hours when the brethren met in choir, to stand reverently in the sight of God and His angels, and to sing the Divine praises with heart and voice in unison.

Between times arts and crafts were plied. The work was for the sake of the monk, not the monk for the sake of the work. "If any one be proud of the skill he has in his craft, because he thereby seems to gain something for the monastery, let him be removed from that craft and not exercise it again, unless after humbling himself he obtains leave from the abbot." This was the rule in St. Andrew's as in Monte Cassino. "Let the devil never catch you idle" was a favourite saying with St. Benedict and his spiritual sons.

No monk was exempt from his share in the manual work about the house and grounds. Even on Sundays and festivals, "if a brother be unwilling or unable to meditate or to read, he shall be given some work that he can do." The other monks thought none the worse of those whose temperament needed to be thus

indulged. St. Gregory remarks in his *Moralia* from the Book of Job:

"Some men are so restless that if they have leisure from work they labour more grievously, for they suffer greater tumults of heart the more freely they are left to thought. Often those who could contemplate God in quiet fail on account of stress of work. Often, too, those who could fulfil His Holy Will when occupied in human purposes have their life extinguished by the sword of contemplation."

And yet in this busy house each one lived his life alone with God. Silence, strictly insisted on, helped to recollection. Pious reading supplied food for holy thoughts. Some time was set apart each day for meditation on the Holy Scripture—that sea, as St. Gregory was the first to call it, "where a lamb can wade, and where an elephant soon swims beyond his depth." Copies of the Bible multiplied in the library awmries, comments on the sacred text were laboriously collated from the writings of the old Fathers. Treatises were written and homilies composed and delivered by those in whom the abbot recognised a special gift.

A letter from St. Gregory, when Pope, to an abbot whom he found somewhat remiss in his duties, shows the importance he attached to intellectual work. "I do not find that the

brethren of your monastery, whom I have met give time to reading. Consider how great a sin it is if, when God gives you sustenance from the offerings of others, you neglect to study His commandments."

Nor would he have the studies entirely restricted to sacred authors. The masterpieces of Latin literature he looked upon as aids to a fuller understanding of Holy Writ.

"The devils know full well," he remarked, that minds well trained in secular learning can more easily reach a high level in things divine. When they strive to take away from our hearts all inclination to study, it is but to hinder us from forging the lance or sword which would be of use to us in the spiritual combat we all have to sustain."

In the sixth century, especially in half-pagan districts, such a weapon might easily prove too sharp-edged to be wielded with safety. Towards the close of his life St. Gregory was "filled with grief and vehement disgust" when a report reached him that the Bishop of Vienne in Gaul gave lectures on profane authors to his friends.

"I cannot mention it without a blush," he writes in 601, "and I hope it is untrue. For the same mouth cannot sing the praises of Jupiter and the praises of Jesus Christ. Be-

think yourself how abominable it is for a bishop to recite verses which are unseemly in the mouth of a Christian layman."

Holy Poverty was very strictly observed. "Let no one presume, without leave from the abbot, to give, receive or hold as his own anything whatsoever, book, tablets, pen, etc." Yet the monks had, for the asking, all they required, "that all pretence of necessity may be removed." The clothing was decent and not too coarse; in winter the cowl was lined with wool.

Flesh meat was forbidden fare. But, except on fast days, there were always two meals. Always at the chief meal a pint of wine was allowed each monk, and there were two hot dishes "because of the infirmities of different people, so that he who cannot eat of one may make his meal of the other."

Special provision was made in the rule for the care of the sick, and Gregory was often on the sick list. The constraint of silence, change in diet, broken sleep, minute obedience, absorption in prayer and study, rough work to which he was unused, all these things tried severely a man not inured to hardship and no longer in his first youth. It was a great change from magistrate to monk, and it soon began to tell upon his health. In the *Dialogues*

he tells of the state to which he was reduced one Lent, when over and above the austerities ordered by the Church and prescribed by his rule, the Benedictine is exhorted "to make some offering in the way of abstinence from food or drink, sleep or laughter, that so he may await the feast of Easter with spiritual joy and desire. Yet he must acquaint the abbot with what he offers, and do it with his consent and blessing."

"I was so sick," writes St. Gregory, "that I often swooned and was continually at death's door unless I did eat something. And when I found that I might not refrain from often eating upon Holy Saturday, a day on which even old people and little children fast, I began to sink more from sorrow than from weakness."

And then he bethought himself of a holy old monk named Eleutherius, "a humble and simple soul, whose tears were of force with God. I went with him, privately, into the oratory and begged him to obtain for me, by his prayers, the strength to fast that day." With humility and tears he fell to his prayers and blessed me after a while and went away. And at the sound of his blessing my stomach grew so strong that all thought of food and all feeling of sickness vanished completely.

"All day long I busied myself about the

affairs of the monastery and never troubled about my health. Indeed, feeling myself so well and strong I began to doubt whether I had eaten or not. And I could very well have gone on fasting till next day."

Flesh meat was allowed by the rule to the infirm; but Gregory, though always sickly, never seems to have required such dispensation. Plain vegetables, properly cooked, suited his needs. But who could guarantee the cooking, when the brethren in the kitchen were changed each week? Sylvia's hermitage, however, was not far distant, and the abbot was willing she should send every day, hot in a silver dish, the portion of pulse which she had carefully prepared for him with her own hands. History is silent as to whether any strengthening condiments were mixed with the food. An abbot's wisdom and a mother's love are fertile in expedients.

A pretty story attaches to the silver dish. One day there came to St. Andrew's a stranger with a pitiful tale of his ships wrecked at sea. Gregory, who seems at that time to have had charge of the alms-giving, gave him six crowns, with kindly words of hope. Next day the stranger came again, urging the greatness of his losses and the little help he could get from his friends. And again he received six crowns. Yet a

third time he came : he was disgraced for ever, should he meet his creditors without means to pay his debts. The alms-chest was by this time quite empty, and there was no other money available in the house. But Gregory, who knew his mother's heart, gave her the merit of the good deed and sent the stranger away quite satisfied with the silver dish.

Years afterwards, when Sylvia had long since passed to her reward and her son was Pope, twelve poor men were entertained each day at dinner in the Lateran Palace. And one day, writes John the Deacon, the Pope counted thirteen and asked the attendant for an explanation

" Believe me, holy Father," replied the man in a confident tone, " there are only twelve, as you yourself gave order."

And, however often they counted the guests during the meal, the servant always found twelve and the Pope thirteen. Moreover, St. Gregory noticed that the poor man seated nearest him frequently altered his features ; sometimes he seemed a young man, sometimes old and venerably grey. So when the Pope dismissed the twelve with his blessing, he took the thirteenth by the hand, led him apart and asked him his name.

" Refresh your memory," came the smiling

reply. "Know in me the shipwrecked merchant who came to you, when you were writing in your cell on the hill Scaurus. You gave me twelve crowns and the silver dish in which your mother, the blessed Sylvia, sent you your cooked pittance of pulse. And you gave with such cheerful heart that I knew for certain Christ had destined you to be head of His Church on earth, successor and Vicar of Peter the Prince of the Apostles."

"How could you know?" exclaimed Gregory amazed.

"Because I am an angel, sent by God to test your constancy."

We have given the incident in John the Deacon's words, and we accept it as literally true, full fain, however, for further detail. Was Gregory abbot at the time or simply a monk? How far did he yield to natural impulse when he gave away his mother's dish? If fault there were—and the angel had no word of blame for him—we may rest assured the saint speedily and amply atoned for it and grew in humility. But what a light it throws on the straitening of Holy Poverty on a man who had ample funds at his disposal, and who hitherto and henceforth was always solicitous, "lest a poor man who asks to be comforted depart in sorrow."

This constancy in his care for the poor is a feature in Gregory's career on which his biographers are bound to lay stress. Holy Church, herself, emphasises it in one of the antiphons for his feast.

"Like an eagle, whose shining wings cover the world with their dazzling radiance, he provided for the needs of all, both little and great, in the large-hearted breadth of his charity."

When he entered religion, he was perfectly aware that he put from him all choice in the allotment of his alms. He did not even know whether his superiors would see fit to make use of his administrative ability in the service of the needy. The yoke of Holy Poverty, however, never seems to have galled unduly. The yoke of obedience sometimes did. He tells us himself:

"It is not very hard for a man to forsake what he has. It is exceedingly laborious for a man to renounce what he is."

Yet in the prime of manhood he deliberately determined to order henceforth his life by rule, whole-heartedly acquiescent in the arrangements of his superiors. He had but a year's noviciate in which to test, whether or not, the strain was beyond his powers, or rather beyond the grace given him from on high.

All too quickly passed that precious year. Later on in life, when he was in a position to make changes in the Rule of St. Benedict, he deemed it prudent to lengthen this time of probation in the case of all religious.

We find him writing to a bishop of Naples: "Let Your Fraternity strictly interdict all monasteries from venturing to tonsure novices before they have completed two years in monastic life. During this space let careful proof be made of their life and manners, lest any of them should not afterwards hold fast to his choice. It is a grievous matter when untried men are banded together in the service of any man. How much more grievous is it to allow untried men to consecrate themselves by life-long vow to the service of the Most High God."

The Holy Pope had, perhaps, his own experiences in mind when he further legislated in 601.

"Henceforth monks shall not be moved to other monasteries, or raised to Sacred Orders, or be employed in any ecclesiastical position, without the consent of their abbot."

It would have been worse than useless for his own abbot to have objected when, shortly after his profession, Gregory was chosen by the Pope then reigning to be one of the cardinal

deacons who were charged with the superintendence of the ecclesiastical regions of Rome.

His duties now obliged him to spend several hours each day outside the walls of St. Andrew's. The religious habit won him still greater respect than the *trabea* "aglow with silk and jewels" which he once wore in the streets as prefect of the city. The manifold works of mercy in which he engaged endeared him to the people among whom he worked.

It was quite in the course of business that he halted one day in the market-place and asked questions about the three flaxen-haired, rosy-cheeked, blue-eyed boys from Yorkshire whom he saw there exposed for sale. For the laws of Rome provided that heathen slaves should have leisure and opportunity for religious instruction, and it was the deacon's duty to make sure that these laws were obeyed.

"The pity of it," he mused aloud, "that the Prince of Darkness should hold such bright beings in thrall and that, with such wondrous grace of form, they should lack the inward beauty of the grace of God."

And as he took down on his tablets the needful particulars, he hid his emotion in the string of puns with which Bede has made us familiar.

"Angles? Yes, they have angelic faces

and should be coheirs with the angels of heaven! They come from Deira? *De-ira* from the wrath. Verily they shall be snatched from God's ire and called to the mercy of Christ! Their king, you say, is called Ella? Soon shall Alleluia be sung in Ella's land!"

The monk went on his way with downcast eyes and even gait, with brain and heart aglow. Henceforth those bright faces haunted him through the busy day, and through the prayerful watches of the night. And the slave-dealer, no doubt, became more careful in his treatment of the lads and warned intending purchasers of the interest taken in them by the popular deacon. Perhaps, punning in his turn, he told how Gregory, "the watchman," would follow their career with watchful eyes and never rest until with shepherd's crook he had gathered them *in grege suo*, among his flock.

But the affair was not to end in mere word-play. Gregory was afire with missionary zeal, and he never ceased entreating Pope and abbot, until he wrung from each permission to leave the good work he was doing in Rome in order to preach the Gospel or be killed for Christ amid the fens and moorlands of the island in the north.

And, once consent obtained, he wasted no time in farewells. Very early one morning, long before the City was astir, he stole noiselessly

out of Rome, with a few companions, before even the news of his departure could be bruited abroad.

On the third day of their journey the little band halted for their noonday meal. And while men and horses rested in the shade, Gregory took out his book. Perhaps he had some arrears of office to make up. And lo! a locust alighted on the open page, and a drowsy voice was heard to murmur:

"Locusta, loco sta! See a locust, stay where you are!" For the insect was of evil omen, betokening hindrance to a journey begun.

Gregory, of course, attached no importance to the superstition. But he was eager for an excuse to shorten the halt; and so under cover of a rebuke to the trifler, he gave orders for an immediate start. But scarcely were the horses caught and the saddle-girths made tight, when a messenger spurred into their midst, with a peremptory order to turn back.

For Rome was in an uproar when the news leaked through that Gregory had left the City, never more to return. Three mobs waylaid the Pope as he went to St. Peter's, and greeted him with clamorous reproach:

"Apostolic Father, what have you done? You have offended St. Peter! You have ruined

Rome! Why did you suffer Gregory to depart?"

The Pope, nothing loath, recognised the people's voice, in this case at any rate, as the Voice of God. He despatched a courier forthwith to recall the people's favourite. Gregory obeyed at once, without a protest. It was not as missionary but as Pope that he was to deserve the title "Apostle of the English."

Disappointment was tempered with the joy of resuming religious routine. Looking back on his years at St. Andrew's he could write, later on, with unfeigned regret:

"In those days I could refrain my tongue from idle words, and keep my mind, almost continually, in an attitude of prayer."

He had, of course, resigned his regionary duties, and the Pope seemed in no hurry to give him back his employment. In reality there was other work awaiting him which reached further in importance to the interests both of the Church and of Rome.

Pelagius intended to name him Apocrisarius (in Latin, Responsalis or Answerer), the Pope's nuncio and business agent at the Court of Constantinople. This time the citizens made no objection to his departure. Within living memory the post of apocrisarius had provided good training for more than one Pope.

CHAPTER IV.

AT CONSTANTINOPLE.

POPE PELAGIUS II had been a monk at Monte Cassino. He allowed Gregory to select his suite among the brethren at St. Andrew's, and quite a band of tried and trusty comrades embarked with him at Ostia for the Golden Horn.

We have grounds for assuming that they went by ship. St. Gregory uses sea-metaphors so freely and so feelingly that he must himself, at one time or another, have become familiar with the dangers of the deep. Besides, he travelled with an embassy. The Patrician, Pamphronius, was carrying to Constantinople Rome's tribute of three thousand pounds in gold, together with an urgent request for military aid. For the Lombard armies were let loose upon the Campagna, hindering the food-supplies from reaching Rome. It is not likely such a convoy would choose the official route—along the Appian Way, and the Egnatian Road on the other side of the Adriatic. For this would mean running the gauntlet of the Duke of Benevent's troops in Italy, as well as of the brigands in Thessaly and Thrace.

It was in the freshness of the early summer that the ship cast anchor in the sunlit waters of the Golden Horn, a crescent-shaped creek affording seven miles of quiet backwater from the rapid currents of the Bosphorus. The fairest, richest and most cultured city in the world stretched before the travellers in beautiful panorama, with open spaces and buildings grouped in orderly arrangement over the Seven Hills and downwards to the water's edge, "like a robe embroidered to the very hem."

For Constantine had planned his capital imperially; and earthquakes and fires and riots provided his successors with opportunities for improving on his plan. The emperors had old Rome in their minds, as a model easy to surpass. They had the architectural masterpieces of classic Greece to incorporate, with thought and taste, into their monuments. They had marbles in their quarries to supplement these antiques, and artists in their employ fit to carry out their ideas. And never was there stint of money to pay for all this magnificence.

Yet St. Gregory, at his first glimpse of the city, must have been more impressed with the busy life astir in the port. Unlike the ancient seat of empire, now decaying slowly on the Tiber—handicapped by bad harbours and shut

in by mountains from the rest of Europe—Rome on the Bosphorus was an active, industrial centre, easily accessible by land or sea, controlling the Danube lands and the markets of the Euxine shores, and moreover fronting the East. Merchant ships from everywhere rode at anchor in the Golden Horn. Foreign traders thronged the streets, offering their wares in barter for the silk, pottery, mosaics and jewel-work which were manufactured in the city and its environs.

At Constantinople no one was allowed to eat his bread in idleness. Able-bodied citizens who refused to work had to seek a home elsewhere. Strangers who lingered in the city without working at their trade or profession were expelled by the quæstor, unless they could show cause, such as a lawsuit, for remaining on.

Our travellers had not far to seek for a church where they might thank God for mercies during the voyage, and invoke His blessing on their work in Constantinople. The shrine of Saints Sergius and Bacchus stood on the southernmost of the quays. Here the services were according to the Latin rite. Here walls and pillars were covered with ex-votos from the grateful mariners of the West.

During the next six years St. Gregory often came to this quiet sanctuary to join in the

prayers familiar to him from childhood. But he found food for piety too in the more ornate ritual of the Greeks. Did he not borrow largely from the Byzantine liturgy later on when he compiled his *Sacramentary?* He could study the elaborate ceremonial at its best in Santa Sofia, the great basilica just rebuilt on a scale to justify Justinian's boast:

"Solomon, I have surpassed thee!"

There was nothing like Santa Sofia in Old Rome. Its peculiar glory was the perfect balance of its system of domes which kept the interior flooded with radiance. At any hour of the day the mosaic pavement sparkled in the sunshine "like a meadow full of flowers in bloom." The light flashed full on the forest of pillars, showing up the delicate tracery of the capitals, and glinting back in rainbowed tints from plinth and shaft.

Some of these pillars were of Phrygian porphyry, red and silver, "powdered with bright stars"; others of Spartan marble, "emerald green, showing slanting streaks, blood-red and livid white"; while yet another variety from the quarries of Lydia suggested to the imaginative chronicler Procopius, "blue corn-flowers in grass with here and there a drift of fallen snow." The High Altar was of solid gold. Forty thousand pounds' weight of silver

adorned the sanctuary. The ambo sparkled with gems.

Gregory was to assist at many a stately function in Santa Sofia; the funeral of the emperor and the patriarch, the crowning and the consecration of their successors, the wedding of the new emperor and the christening of his heir. And dearly as he loved the beauty of God's house, he rejoiced more, as he worshipped amid its structural magnificence, because "the emperor and the patriarch show on every occasion that their Church is subject to the Apostolic See."

The Pope's representative had his lodging in the Placidia wing of the emperor's own palace. Gregory and his companions could find quiet nooks for prayer, for study, and for recreation in the beautiful gardens and woodlands sloping downwards to the Bosphorus. They followed, as far as possible, the same rule of life as at St. Andrew's.

"In losing the peace of my monastic home," wrote Gregory, "I learn its value. For when I had it, I did not esteem enough that treasure which needs to be cherished with the utmost care."

He blessed God for inspiring so many of his brethren to follow him from Rome.

"In this I see clearly the Hand of the Most

High. For their example, like a firm cable, held me fast moored to the shore of prayer, while I was buffeted to and fro on the restless billows of worldly concerns. I fled to their company as to a haven of safety, and daily in their midst strengthened my soul against the disturbance of temporal business, by the intercourse of study and careful discussion of the Holy Scriptures."

From the discourses he then delivered, he compiled later on his *Moralia* from the Book of Job, to show, says Bede, "how far this book is to be understood literally, how it is to be referred to the mysteries of Christ and His Church, and in what sense it is to be adapted to every one of the faithful."

His audience was not restricted to his own monks. There were notable Latins at Constantinople during those years, none more notable than St. Leander of Seville, who had come to beg the emperor to intervene on behalf of the persecuted Catholics in Spain.

St. Leander was the closest friend St. Gregory ever had. They were never to meet elsewhere on earth; yet, years afterwards, the Italian wrote to the Spaniard: "The image of thy countenance is for ever imprinted upon my innermost heart." The two saints had much in common. Both were accurate theologians, both diligent students of Holy Scripture, and both

skilled in music. St. Leander, moreover, was always the friend of monks, and became from first acquaintance an ardent admirer of St. Gregory. He spent much of his leisure at the Placidia, joining in the religious exercises and studies, very helpful with his criticism and sound advice. St. Gregory laid bare his heart to him with all its weaknesses. He told him of his long struggle with grace, before he could bring himself to forsake the world ; he told him of his grief and anxiety at finding himself again entangled in worldly affairs. We shall hear more of St. Leander later on.

Despite the handicap of language, St. Gregory also made friends among the Greeks. Foremost among these we may mention Eutychius, the patriarch of Constantinople, whom the Easterns honour among the saints. He was a man of holy life, famous for his miracles, for his alms-deeds, for his firm stand against imperial encroachments. At one time Justinian drove him from his see, but the clamour of the citizens brought him back, when he had spent twelve happy years in a monastery. On the first Sunday after his return he distributed Holy Communion for six hours in Santa Sofia.

Eutychius was an acute thinker. But in his sermons and in his writings he maintained that the bodies of the just shall rise in glory,

"impalpable and more subtle than the air or wind." St. Gregory did not fail to show him he was wrong, and urged among other texts the words of the Risen Lord to His Apostles:

"A spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see Me to have."

Eutychius argued, in his turn, that Our Lord spoke thus to remove all doubt of His Resurrection.

"What!" exclaimed Gregory, "would you have us doubt of the very thing which cured the doubt of the Apostles?"

The point was argued in the presence of the emperor, who ordered the patriarch to burn his books. Eutychius, thus silenced, would not own himself convinced. Ill-health may have had to do with his pertinacity, for he did not long outlive his defeat. Gregory, ill himself at the time, sent him kind greetings on his death-bed; and the messengers brought back word that the sick man took hold of the skin of his own emaciated hand, and said to them in a clear voice, "I acknowledge that in this very flesh I shall rise again and behold my God."

Bede the Venerable, when he tells the story, accuses Eutychius of heresy. We think St. Gregory would have disapproved of the word. He always disliked the dogma-mongers who indulged in controversy for the delight of

proving their opponent a heretic. Such religious discussion was fashionable in the East.

"There are many orthodox persons," he regrets, "who fancy they are fighting heretics, while really they are creating heresies."

His own practice was to deal personally with those who uttered novelties, offensive to pious ears. More often than not a straightforward, heart-to-heart talk satisfied him that they did not really hold the foolish opinions imputed to them. A man might say, for instance, that Baptism did not really forgive actual sin, and yet mean nothing worse than that contrition is an essential disposition for the baptism of adults. Another might begin by maintaining that a marriage is dissolved when one of the contracting parties enters religion, and end by smiling at his own absurdity, or stand aghast at the issues involved, when the question was put before him in all its aspects.

Eutychius was followed in the see of Constantinople by John the Faster, a stern man, "the despot of his own passions," and with little pity for the weaknesses of other men. Thus he insisted that a man convicted of sorcery should be burnt alive, even though the emperor himself pleaded that the criminal should be given time and opportunity to repent. As representative of the Holy See, Gregory

must have had his tact and his courtesy strained to the utmost in his dealings with John. The time had not yet come when as Pope he could write to the patriarch in all charity :

" Your Fraternity well knows what the Canons say about bishops who seek to make themselves feared by stripes. The illustrious preacher, St. Paul, says, ' Reprove, entreat, rebuke with all patience and doctrine.' It is an unheard of method of preaching to extort faith by stripes."

St. Gregory must also have been disgusted with John's arrogant attitude towards his brother patriarchs of Alexandria and of Antioch. He must have watched uneasily the trend in " the emperor's bishop " to make Constantinople supreme in ecclesiastical matters throughout the East. Much, he foresaw, depended on the individual character of the reigning monarch.

Two emperors succeeded each other while he was at Constantinople : Tiberius, grey-eyed, tall and yellow-haired ; and Maurice, short, sturdy, red-faced and bald. And the two were as unlike in disposition as in appearance.

With Tiberius, Gregory's intercourse was always agreeable. The emperor received the embassy with every mark of honour. His own wars, however, absorbed his military resources. All he could do for Rome was to send back the tribute, and advise the Pope to hire the

Franks to fight the Lombards. It would relieve Italy too, he suggested, if the Lombard dukes could be persuaded to come with their troops and help the emperor in his campaigns against the Persians and the Avars.

A brave and able soldier was Tiberius, and a great and generous Christian, who considered in his alms-giving less what the needy ought to receive than what an emperor ought to bestow. He strengthened his defences by the levy and upkeep of a large and well-disciplined army. But he would not conscript recruits from the agricultural classes, and he scorned to fill his coffers with gold wrung from the taxpayers at the cost of bitter suffering.

"Our treasury will never be empty so long as there are poor to relieve and captives to ransom." Such was his reply, when the empress dowager reproached him with squandering in an hour sums which it had taken her husband years to collect.

And sure enough, he never lacked for ready money. One day, the story goes, he noticed a slab in the pavement of his palace with a cross engraven thereon.

"We fortify our brow and breast with the Sign of Redemption," he exclaimed, "yet here we tread it under foot."

He ordered the slab to be removed, and a

second and yet a third which lay underneath. In the hollow thus exposed a vast amount of gold and gems was found, enough to satisfy his needs, and gratify his benevolent impulses.

Tiberius had no son to succeed him. When he felt his bodily forces failing, he betrothed his younger daughter, Constantia, to Maurice, the one among his generals whom he considered worthiest to wear the crown.

"I pray you, Maurice," he exhorted, "let your reign be the noblest epitaph in my honour. Shame not the hopes of those who have thus trusted you. Look upon the sceptre as an emblem of slavery, and not as denoting the unbridled exercise of power. Prefer reproof to flattery in your counsellors. Seek to be loved rather than feared by your subjects. And remember that, whether you follow my advice or not, you will one day stand before the Judgment Seat of God whose verdict no bribes can sway."

Maurice, the new emperor, came to the throne at the age of forty-three. A rough, hard-working soldier, well acquainted with the details of administration, he made a good subordinate, but lacked the qualities essential to success at the head of the State. His brave death belongs to another chapter, and the story of the trouble he was to cause St. Gregory.

For the present Maurice was all smiles and goodwill. Like Tiberius he had no men, not even a duke, to spare for Italy. But he begged the Pope's representative to act as godfather when a son was born to him "in the purple." And Gregory made some valued friends at his Court, notably the physician Theodore, who could always be relied upon to transmit disagreeable messages in the least disagreeable manner. The Empress Constantia, also, and her sister Theoctista continued through life his staunch and loyal friends. Both these ladies spoke Latin like their mother tongue. They came to St. Gregory for advice about their souls, and attended as respectful listeners at the discussions in the Palace Placidia.

Our saint had the gift of making and of keeping useful friends. Maximianus his abbot "upon charity came to visit him with others of his monks," wisely foreseeing that to guide St. Gregory in the paths of holiness was the greatest service he could render to the Church. He resigned St. Andrew's to the abbot Valens, and came to Constantinople, where he abode at the Placidia a year, or maybe two. We read in the *Dialogues* of "the wrath and favour of God" which he tasted in the homeward journey.

For a storm befell him in the Adriatic. "The sea did so rage with the fury of the winds

that the mast was swept overboard and the sails floated upon the waves. The ship, battered by boisterous billows, leaked so fast that it seemed not so much the ship in the waters as the waters in the ship." The sailors and passengers, "void of all hope in this life," gave one another the kiss of peace, and strengthened their souls for death by Holy Communion. And then, "God who had wonderfully terrified their minds did still more wonderfully preserve their lives." For the ship, thus full of water, held on her course for yet another week. On the ninth day all were safely landed in the port of Crotona. "The reverend man, Maximianus, was the last to leave the ship, and as soon as he set foot on shore the vessel sank. Whereby God gave them to understand that when it was laden, His own Divine Hand did direct and preserve it; and when it was empty and His Hand withdrawn, it could not continue above the water."

Gregory in his turn received letters of recall in 586. Pelagius meant to utilize his talent for writing good business letters, and perhaps foresaw in him his own successor.

No need now to make the journey by sea. We may assume that the Court functionaries accompanied the Pope's representative in honourable escort as far as the eastern boundary

of the city. As he parted from them beneath the triple archway of the Golden Gate, he could look backward for the last time to the great porphyry pillar in the Agora of Constantine, and from his heart repeat the prayer which the imperial founder had engraved on its plinth :

" O Christ, Master and Ruler of the universe, to Thee have I consecrated this obedient city, and this sceptre and the power of Rome. Do Thou guard it and deliver it from all harm."

The six years which St. Gregory spent in Constantinople, gave good training for his future career. He had learnt to make allowances for the effects on human character of climate, luxury and form of government. He had studied the needs and tendencies and trend of thought in the Eastern Churches. He had made many valuable friendships. He had secured the goodwill of influential persons about the Court. He had seen the perils of autocracy in both Church and State, and learned to treat his own underlings with esteem and confidence. He had realized that the emperor was a broken reed to lean upon, and that the West must save itself by its own exertions, and by the vigorous and independent action of the Holy See.

He had now four more years at Rome, in immediate preparation for his responsibilities as the Vicar of Christ upon earth.

CHAPTER V

Abbot of St. Andrews.

SOON after his return to his monastery St. Gregory was elected abbot. He found the community regular and fervent, for St. Andrew's had been blessed with a series of superiors who ruled in the true spirit of St. Benedict, guiding the brethren by example and discourse, "reproving the disorderly with sharpness, but exhorting the meek and patient with entreaties," singling out none for favour, "unless a monk be found who surpassed his fellows in obedience and good works."

The new abbot had but to continue the system. Four happy years ensued in labour and prayer and deeds of mercy, in unslackening watchfulness lest abuses should creep in. Later in life he thus advises Conan, Abbot of Lérins:

"Let the good feel that you are kind, the evildoers that you know how to punish. Be careful to love the men themselves, even when you deal severely with their faults. Otherwise correction will be cruelty, and you will lose those whom you wish to improve. A surgeon cuts away what is diseased, without ulcerating

the sound part of the limb. Should he press too hard upon the knife, he only injures the person whom he is anxious to benefit. Your kindness must be wary and not lax, your punishments careful and assiduous, not unduly severe. Attend well to this counsel, my beloved son, so that the fervent, while they love you, may have something to fear ; and the lukewarm, while they fear you, may have something to love. Thus you yourself may render in safety to God all those whom He hath entrusted to your care."

He was especially careful in the matter of Holy Poverty. In his own words, " The desire to acquire private property is a sure sign that a man hath not the heart of a true monk. When monks possess anything as their own, neither peace nor charity can long endure. How can those despise the world who even in their monastery lust after gold ? "

Such was the theory. A story in the *Dialogues*—a pleasant, comforting story his listener calls it—illustrates his firm and tender treatment of the souls whom he guided to God.

" A monk there was in my monastery, Justus by name, skilled in the art of medicine, who served me diligently in my frequent ailments. His brother, Copiosus, still practises as a physician in Rome. When Justus lay at the

point of death, the brethren tossing up all his phials and boxes found three golden solidi * hidden away among the drugs. This discovery grieved me much. I could not quietly digest so great a sin, for it was a rule in our monastery that all things should be held in common: private ownership was quite forbidden. I pondered what was best to be done, for the cleansing of our dying brother, and for a warning to the others. At length I sent for Pretiosus the prior:

"'See,' quoth I, 'that none of the monks visit Justus in his sickness nor speak to him any comforting words. And should he ask for the brethren, Copiosus is to tell him that they all loathe him for the three coins he hath in hoard. And thus at least before his death the bitterness of his fault may sink into his heart, and sorrow may purge away his guilt. And dig him a grave in some dung-pit or other, and cast the three coins into it together with his body, all present crying out with one accord, "Thy money perish with thee!" And so cast earth upon him.'

"By God's goodness all fell out as arranged. Justus, when he heard his sentence, straightway sighed for his sin, and in that sorrow gave up

* About thirty shillings of our money.

the ghost. And the other monks began immediately to give up the trifles which it was quite lawful to have by them for their use and convenience."

A month later the abbot again called the prior, and said to him with a heavy heart :

" Our brother is now a good while tormented in fire. It is high time that we show him some charity, and labour to set him free. Go, therefore, and arrange that for thirty days the holy and health-giving Sacrifice of the Mass be offered for his absolution."

So said, so done. But Gregory, busied with many cares, kept no account of the days. When the thirtieth Mass had been said—the first mention of a *trental* or month's mind—Copiosus, who knew nothing of the arrangement, saw his brother in a dream. And Justus said to him, with joy in his countenance :

" Hitherto I have been in bad case. But now all is well. To-day I am received into the company of the Blessed."

Incidentally we gather from the story that the monks lived very frugally, and that the abbot trusted the prior with the details of administration. St. Andrew's was well endowed, and Pretiosus saw to it that there was always a surplus fund for almsgiving and good works. While St. Gregory was abbot, the foundations

were laid of the Church which he lived to consecrate.

The memory of his own freedom from money-straits made him, all his life, inclined to help communities less happily circumstanced. Thus in the fifth year of his pontificate, he wrote to Elias, an abbot in Isauria :

" You have asked for fifty shillings to be sent to you for the wants of your monastery. But thinking this too much, you say you will send us back ten, and lest even this be burdensome, you are willing to return still more to us. Because we find that you are very merciful to our charity, we reply to your mercy thus. We have sent fifty shillings already, and lest this be too little we send ten more, and in case this be too little we add yet another twelve."

In another case he instructs his business man to befriend a community of nuns :

" We are impelled by the duty of piety to make due provision for convents, lest those who are known to be set apart for the service of God should suffer want, which God forbid."

He had now leisure to complete his commentary on the Book of Job. He sent a copy to St. Leander at Seville, and enclosed a covering letter :

" The first parts of the book I preached to the brethren, the latter parts I dictated.

Finally, when I had more time at my disposal, I corrected and re-arranged all that had been taken down by the brethren as I delivered it in discourse, adding much, omitting a little, bringing the notes taken at Constantinople into harmony with the style of the part dictated in this city. But I have not been able to correct the third part with any degree of exactness, because the brethren continually drew away my attention to other things."

Gregory was lenient to the faulty diction of his scribes, as long as it expressed his real meaning. But he speaks very slightingly of this great work of his, which his own and succeeding ages have held in high esteem. He compares his own expounding of Holy Writ to the brute braying of an ass, to a leaden pipe supplying pure water for the service of men.

When Innocent, the prefect of Africa, wrote for a copy of the *Moralia*, he sent it indeed, but coupled with the advice:

"If you wish to feast on delicious fare, read the works of your countryman, the Blessed Augustine, and do not seek our bran in preference to his wheat."

He was displeased when word reached him that Marinianus, Archbishop of Ravenna, had ordered portions of the work to be read at Matins in his churches.

"With an uninstructed audience," he wrote, "it is likely to do more harm than good. Have read instead some commentary on the psalms which may mould the minds of the people to good habits. As long as I live I do not wish that anything I have composed should become generally known."

Marinianus of Ravenna, Maximianus of Syracuse, Augustine the Apostle of England, these and such as these were the men who lived under St. Gregory at St. Andrew's. Their monastic training fitted them peculiarly for the pastoral office which they were to exercise later on. They did not misunderstand, when he chid them in charity for their weaknesses and idiosyncrasies. The abbot-pope thoroughly understood monks. He knew their influence over others, he foresaw their worth to the Church. But as Mgr. Mann so well observes, in his *Lives of the Popes*:

"The monks were practically a new element in the Church—in the West at least, and in that development they had received through the organising hand of St. Benedict. Naturally then, time was required to fix their relations to the authorities of the Church, and for themselves to settle down as one of its ordinary working powers."

It needed a monk-pope in the first instance

to bring their rule into harmony with Canon Law, so that the rights of abbots and bishops might not clash.

In 601 he issued an encyclical. "Gregory the Bishop, Servant of the Servants of God, to all bishops.

"The office formerly held by Us in the government of a monastery has shown Us how necessary it is to provide for the quiet of monasteries, and to legislate for their stability. . . . We therefore interdict in the Name of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the authority of Blessed Peter the Prince of the Apostles, in whose place we preside over the Church, We forbid any bishop or layman, by any means in the future, to diminish the revenues, or the property, of monasteries, or cells, or farms which belong to them, or to attempt it by fraud or evasion. . . . At the death of an abbot a stranger shall not be elected, unless the brethren themselves choose him of their own free will, and he who is elected shall be consecrated without fraud or bribery. . . . No person, under any pretext, shall be placed over a constituted abbot, unless for crimes which the Sacred Canons declare should be punished. . . .

"We altogether forbid a bishop to celebrate public masses in a monastery, lest occasion be given for any assembly of people in the retreats

of the servants of God, or for the introduction of women into their precincts, which is by no means good for their souls. A bishop shall not establish his cathedral chair in a monastery, nor exercise therein any power of any kind, nor make even the slightest regulation, unless requested by the local abbot. Without the knowledge and consent of the abbot no monk may be placed in charge of a church, or be promoted to any dignity."

The bishops accepted the encyclical in the spirit in which it was drafted. One copy is on record, signed by twenty-two bishops and sixteen priests :

" We rejoice in the liberty of the monks, and confirm what your Holiness has written about them."

St. Gregory's letters abound in instances of his zeal for the spiritual and temporal welfare of religious of either sex.

At one time he notifies the Bishop of Cagliari of " an evil which Your Fraternity will remove." Because no procurator had been assigned to any convent in Sardinia, " the virgins dedicated to God are compelled to go through villages and farms to pay taxes and mix themselves up in business only suitable for men."

Other letters empower bishops to consecrate convent chapels, "provided it is clear that no

corpse has been buried there," provided also that the convents are suitably endowed. In one case he insists on ten shillings of revenue, free from local tribute, eight slaves, three yoke of oxen, ten horses, ten cows, forty sheep, and four plants for vines. In another the bishop is expected to provide and secure his gift by municipal deed, " a silver chalice, a silver paten, three altar-cloths, ten beds, fifty sets of utensils in brass and iron, two specified farms, two slaves* (Maurus and John) and two yoke of oxen." No detail seems too insignificant to escape this watchful father in God.

On the other hand, he is stern with religious who abuse the privileges he was at such pains to secure for them. He is much displeased at a petition from a monastery near Ravenna. " They seem to me themselves worldly-minded since they seek to have a worldling as abbot."

He writes to the monks of Monte Cristo: " We have been told that you do not keep your rule. We are obliged to send to you the abbot Horosius, bearer of this command. He comes to inquire minutely into all your doings, to order whatsoever shall appear to him seemly, and to report to Us. We admonish you to obey

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* For his views in slavery see Chapter XI.

him with all reverence, as if his commands come to you direct from Us."

He sends an abbot, weighed and found wanting, with a letter to the Bishop of Palermo. "On no consideration will We allow the bearer, Gregory, abbot and priest of the monastery of St. Theodore, ever again to preside over a house which he has proved himself unworthy to govern. For his negligence has led too many disciples astray. But since he has done penance for a long time here, under our eyes, it is fitting that Your Fraternity shall receive him back into the aforesaid monastery. Urbicus, the prior of my monastery, will send someone to become his prior."

"My monastery" was, of course, St. Andrew's, on the Cœlian Hill, whose head superior, during his pontificate, was always called prior instead of abbot. For as long as life lasted, St. Gregory kept in touch with each of his monks. The *Dialogues* abound in instances of their holiness and of their happy deaths. His tenderness and zeal are shown still more strikingly in his fatherly pursuit of the ex-monk, Venantius; but the story has to be pieced out from letters extending over a series of years.

Venantius was a rich nobleman of Syracuse who took the habit at St. Andrew's, but forsook the cloister in order to marry Italica, a beautiful

and accomplished lady, whose charms, St. Gregory piously hopes, were not the outward covering of a hidden sore in her soul. His friends and clients were numerous. He seems to have been one of the great men in Sicily with influential connections at the Court of Constantinople. Things were going well with the prodigal, when St. Gregory addressed his first letter to him, shortly after he became Pope.

"Many foolishly thought that I should now decline to speak or write to you. But it is not so. My very position compels me, and I cannot be silent. Whether you wish it or not, I shall not hold my peace; for with all my strength I wish you to be saved, or at any rate to free myself from the guilt of your destruction. Remember the habit which once you wore. Ponder how low you have fallen, because you put away from you the thought of the severe judgments of Almighty God. Tremble, while yet there is time, lest you taste the bitterness of His wrath when you can no longer escape from it by tears.

"You know the punishment meted out to Ananias for taking away from God the money which he had vowed. Consider your own peril at the Judgment Seat, for you have withdrawn not coin but yourself whom you have dedicated

wholly to God when you became a monk. I speak to you in sorrow; nay, stricken with grief at your sin, I can scarce speak at all. Yet you, conscious of your guilt, you can scarce endure to hear me. You blush, you are confused, you remonstrate. If the words of my dust are so hard to bear, what will you do when your Creator utters your doom? Great is the mercy of Divine Grace! God sees you fleeing from life, and preserves you for life. He sees you proud and bears with your pride. He inspires His unworthy servant to rebuke and admonish.

"I know that when this letter reaches you, your friends and literary clients will immediately assemble. You will seek counsel in a case of life or death from men who are advocates of death, who love not you but your money, who say only what will please for the time. Such men as these, you remember, led you on to your great sin. To quote Seneca, 'Weigh well all matters with your friends, but first of all weigh well your friends themselves.'

"If you want advice, choose me for your adviser. I will counsel you faithfully, for I love not your goods, but you. May Almighty God reveal to your heart with what love and charity my heart embraces you, as far as grace allows. I blame your fault, because I love yourself. I love you so dearly that I will have none of

your wicked sin. Believe in my love and come to me for advice, here at the threshold of the Apostles. If perchance you suspect me as too exacting on God's behalf, I am ready to call the whole Church into Council upon the question, and whatever all agree can be done with safety, I shall not oppose, but gladly endorse the common decision. Do as I advise, and may the Grace of God preserve you."

But the ex-monk hardened his heart. In 596 he and his unruly retainers gave such scandal that John, Bishop of Syracuse refused his gifts and forbade Mass to be said in his house. The Pope wrote gently to Venantius, advising him to be reconciled to his bishop; and he enjoined the bishop to accept his offerings, and himself to say Mass in the private chapel.

In 601 Italica was dead, and Venantius a dying man. St. Gregory wrote twice, urging him to care less for his bodily ailments than for the health of his soul.

"Pain is sent to teach us the fear of God, and so to shield us from the punishment our sins deserve. There are millions of men wallowing in wanton ease, headlong in blasphemy and pride, obdurate in robbery and wickedness, who have never had so much as a headache to trouble them, but have been struck

down suddenly and plunged into hell fire. It is a token that God does not forsake us, when He scourges us continually through the affliction of the flesh."

In these letters there is no direct reference to Venantius's guilt. But St. Gregory wrote so well to the Bishop of Syracuse :

" Exhort, entreat, set before him God's dreadful judgments, hold out the promise of God's ineffable mercy, so that at even at the last hour he may be induced to return to his former state, and so his great sin may not stand against him in the eternal judgment."

Venantius left two daughters, Barbara and Antonina. St. Gregory expressed annoyance because the emperor and not himself had been appointed guardian to the orphaned girls. But no hint of this comes out in his letter of affectionate advice :

" I implore Almighty God to safeguard you from evil thoughts and from perverse men, and to settle you happily in a marriage whereat we may all rejoice. My sweet daughters, trust in Him to help you. Under the shadow of His defence may you ever escape the snares of the wicked. You say you are hastening to the Threshold of St. Peter, Prince of the Apostles. I fervently hope to see you united in his church to worthy husbands. So may you obtain some

little comfort from me, and I may have great joy from your presence. . . .

" I accept with pleasure your gift of two rugs which you tell me you have made yourselves. But that I do not believe. You seek to be praised for the work of others. Very likely you have never handled a distaff. Yet this does not trouble me, for I wish you to love reading the Scriptures, so that, when you have husbands, you may know how to order your lives aright and how to conduct your households."

In his last letter to Venantius, St. Gregory alludes to his own gout. This malady had gripped him so acutely that in the year 600 he had not left his bed for two years except to say Mass on feast days.

" Almost immediately I am forced to lie down again so that I may ease the torture with occasional groans. Sometimes the pain is moderate, sometimes excessive ; but it is never so moderate as to leave me, and never so excessive as to kill me. Hence it happens that I die daily, and daily am snatched from the jaws of death."

Equal in pathos is his heart-outpouring next year to his spiritual son, Marinianus.

" At one time the pain of the gout is torture. At another, I know not what fire spreads itself

all through my body. Sometimes the burning struggles with the gout, and body and mind seem to part company. Between the attacks I am so exhausted that I await death as the only remedy for my ills. Dear brother, ask mercy for me from our All-Merciful God, that He may mitigate the scourge with which He chastens me and grant me patience to endure. Pray, dearest brother, lest the heart (which God forbid !) from over-weariness become impatient, lest murmuring increase the faults which can be thoroughly cured by pain well borne."

It is well to emphasise thus early in his biography that Gregory was one of those master-spirits who have made their mark in history, while themselves a prey to bodily disease. Our own Alfred the Great is a case in point—the King who prayed for some infirmity that would keep him humble, yet not interfere with his work nor render him contemptible in the eyes of his subjects. England's Darling had studied to some purpose, and learnt from St. Gregory to define Patience as "Humility in endurance." And so we apply to this King and to this Pope what Fuller says of a Renaissance ruler, far less loved and loveworthy than either: "His eager soul, biting at the clay of his body, desired to fret a passage through."

Sick or well our holy Pope never slackened in zeal. "He was always busy," writes Paul the Deacon, "providing for the needs of his flock, writing some treatise worthy of the Church, searching out the secrets of heaven in holy prayer."

Even at St. Andrew's the prayers and tears of Eleutherius could not always win him a respite from the inconveniences of ill-health. Witness his letter to St. Leander, already quoted, where he urges among other apologies for the lack of polish in the *Moralia* from the Book of Job:

"I am suffering from a series of slow fevers. For many a long year the powers of my digestive organs are so disordered that I am always ailing. And what is the body but the instrument of the mind? However skilled the musician, he can extract only grating sounds from a cracked flute. . . . Perchance it is the Will of God that, as one struck by Him, I should expound Job in his affliction, and that under the scourge myself I should better understand the mind of one so scourged."

CHAPTER VI.

The Procession on St. Mark's Day.

POPE ST. GREGORY had in his mind other abbots, healthier than he, and less liable to be diverted from their work by the need of writing books, when he wrote to Maximianus, once his own superior at St. Andrew's, and now Bishop of Syracuse :

" Do not allow priests or deacons or persons of any grade who serve churches to be at the same time abbots in monasteries. The duties of each office are so engrossing that no one can attend properly to both."

The Pope whom he succeeded, Pelagius II, had himself been a monk in Monte Cassino. He knew, therefore, that Abbot Gregory had enough on his hands—his monks, his desk-work, his charities, the building of his church. Yet Pelagius had to make calls on his time.

The affair of the Three Chapters menaced schism. To Gregory's pen was entrusted the delicate task of inducing the Italian bishops to acquiesce in the decision of the Holy See. There were other points on which his experience was invaluable—the concerns of the Eastern

Churches, for instance, and all dealings with the emperor. And most certainly he was at the right hand of Pelagius in the last dreadful year of his pontificate, when Rome was afflicted with the threefold scourge of famine, war and pestilence.

War was nothing new. The Lombards terrorised the land since 568, and famine followed in their wake. Yet wheat from Sicily and Egypt came regularly by sea to Ostia, and was stored in the imperial granaries of Old Rome for distribution among the citizens.

In 589 Duke Zotto burnt Monte Cassino; and the monks fled to Rome, laden "like pack-asses" with their precious books. In the autumn of that same year a series of floods and earthquakes played havoc with the standing crops in various parts of Italy. At Verona there occurred a marvel which St. Gregory, in his *Dialogues*, likens to the miracle of the Three Children in the Fiery Furnace.

"For the river Adige did so swell, that it came to the church of the holy bishop and martyr St. Zeno, and rose as high as the windows not far from the roof itself. The church doors stood open, but the thin liquid formed a solid wall that barred all exit. The people, forced to remain in the church, took of this water to quench their thirst. It stood there in the door-

way, water to them for their comfort, and yet not water to ruin the place. All this showed the merits of Christ's martyr, St. Zeno."

The Tiber, too, overflowed its banks. It ran over the walls of Rome, says our saint, turned the low-lying district around the Vatican into a fœtid swamp, and undermined the buildings in the Campus Martius. We read of a dragon of huge size, choking in the salt waters at the river's mouth, and poisoning the air with its putrefying breath.

Stripped of metaphor, the plague was in Rome, a compound of typhus fever with the more malignant forms of measles and small-pox. Death followed close upon seizure. When a man sneezed, the bystanders cried "God bless you." When a man yawned, he himself traced the Sign of the Cross in front of his open mouth. For yawning and sneezing were sure symptoms of the disease. In the delirium that ensued, strange sights were seen. Sometimes sinners died in despair. Sometimes they recovered and reformed their lives. Several curious stories in the *Dialogues* refer to this scourge.

The monks of St. Andrew's, at any rate, were not afraid of contact with the plague-stricken. St. Gregory writes: "There was in my monastery a very unruly lad named Theodore, who came to us more upon necessity than of

his own accord. He could not bear that anyone should speak a word to him for the good of his soul. He would neither do good works nor hearken to anything good. With oaths, with angry words, with curses, with scoffing laughter, he protested that he never meant to put on the habit of a holy life. This untoward boy was striken with the plague. One half of his body was already dead, and only in his breast a little life remained. The monks knelt around his couch, and the nearer they saw him to his end, the more fervently did they commend him to God's mercy.

"'Depart, depart,' he called out suddenly. 'I am given over to a dragon to be devoured, and he cannot devour me because you are here. He has already swallowed my head. Let him be, that he may not torture me longer, but do what he has to do.'

"'What words are these?' they made answer. 'Strengthen thyself, Brother, with the Sign of the Cross.'

"'I wish I could!' he replied, 'but I am fettered by the coils of the dragon.'

"The monks fell prostrate on the ground, and prayed in zeal with tears. And presently the boy called out again:

"'Thank God, the dragon at last has fled! He could not abide your prayers. Now, I

beseech you, make intercession for my sins, for I am fully resolved to become a monk.'

"And indeed he came back to life, and turned to God with his whole heart. He was still a long time chastised with afflictions before his soul departed from the miseries of this mortal life."

The reigning Pope fell a victim to the plague, and died on the 7th of February, 590. The choice of his successor rested with the clergy, the senate and the people of Rome, and the votes were unanimous in Gregory's favour. He had good birth, sound judgment, virtue, talent, business experience, and was popular both in Rome and at the Court of Constantinople.

It was most unlikely that the emperor would withhold his consent. Yet it was on Maurice's veto that the Pope-elect pinned his hopes, for the Romans were deaf to his tears and entreaties. He wrote off at once to the emperor and to influential persons at Court. Afterwards he blamed his friends at Constantinople for their inertia at this crisis of his fortunes. The truth is they never received his letters. The prefect of Rome detained his courier, and sent off instead the official papers dealing with the election, and sound reasons besides to show Gregory's fitness for the high responsibilities to which he was called.

Months elapsed before an answer could arrive. Meanwhile the plague increased its ravages. Fear paralysed all efforts to control it, panic added to the death roll, the dead remained unburied. Gregory sent his monks among the citizens to exhort, to encourage, to enforce sanitation. He himself mounted the ambo in one of the principal churches, and preached on the efficacy of contrite prayer.

"Affliction oftentimes leads to conversion. May God's chastisements soften our hard hearts! You see yourselves there is no interval of ill-health between seizure and death. Before the sufferer has time to repent he is gone. And oh! in what fearful plight does that man stand, who meets the glance of the terrible Judge, before he has time to bewail his sins. Whole households die in batches. Parents see their children go before them to the grave. We must seek safety in compunction before we are struck down, and while there is time to weep.

"Let us recall our sins to mind so that we may ask God to forgive them, and lift up our hands with our hearts to God, heightening the earnestness of our prayers by the merits of good works. He gives confidence to our trembling, who says by the mouth of His prophet: 'I will not the death of a sinner, but that he be converted and live.' Let none despair because

his crimes are heinous, since three days' prayer purged the Ninivites, hardened in sin. The converted robber earned eternal life in the very instant of his death. . . .

"Let us persist with clamorous tears. Importunity annoys men but pleases the God of truth. . . . And so, beloved brethren, with contrite hearts and amended lives, let us assemble on the fourth day of the week, at early dawn, in seven groups, singing litanies through the streets of Rome."

Very early on the appointed day—it was Wednesday, the 25th of April—the priests were astir in the principal church of each of the seven regions. For the clergy of Rome were to meet at the Church of Saints Cosmas and Damian, the abbots and their monks at Saints Gervasius and Protasius, the abbesses and their nuns at Saints Marcellinus and Peter, the children at Saints John and Paul, the men at St. Stephen, the married women at St. Clement, and the widows at St. Euphemia. And as the seven groups wound slowly through the city streets, eighty persons fell out of the ranks to drop dead of the plague. But the suppliant chant never faltered.

At St. Mary Major, Gregory awaited to exhort anew to confidence in persevering prayer. He now took his place in the procession, and at

its head he caused to be borne aloft the miraculous image which, according to the Golden Legend, " St. Luke the Evangelist had carved and painted after the likeness of the glorious Mother of God."

From St. Mary's on the Esquiline they moved westward to St. Peter's on the Vatican. And when they came to the bridge that spanned the Tiber they saw, on the topmost cupola of Hadrian's marble mausoleum, the archangel St. Michael in the act of sheathing his flaming sword. And anon the mortality ceased, the air became wholesome and clear, and round the image of Our Lady angelic voices brought to earth the three first lines of the Easter anthem :

" Regina Cœli lætare, Alleluia !
Quia quem meruisti portare, Alleluia !
Resurrexit sicut dixit, Alleluia !

And when the heavenly music ceased, St. Gregory lifted his voice in glad and grateful confidence :

" Ora pro nobis, Deum, Alleluia ! "

Soon came sorrow to mingle with his joy. Letters from the emperor reached Rome in the summer. Maurice was delighted with the choice of the electors. Gregory's feelings may be gauged from his letters.

To the emperor's sister-in-law, Theoctista, he wrote in his dismay: "I am now more in bondage to earthly cares than ever I was as a layman. I have lost the deep joy of solitude, and while I am outwardly exalted, my spiritual self is cast down headlong into an abyss. . . . Amid the whirlwind of this trial I fear and tremble, and not for myself alone. I am terribly afraid for those committed to my care. . . .

"I longed to sit with Mary at the Master's Feet, and lo! I am compelled, like Martha, to be troubled about many things. I thought the legion of devils had been cast out of me and I wished to rest a while near Our Lord and lo! I have to go back to my countrymen and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for me. But who, amid so many earthly cares, can declare the glorious works of God? As for me, I find it difficult even to think of them. There are indeed men who can so control their outward prosperity that it does not degrade them. But for me the task is beyond my strength, for what the mind is unwilling to undertake it cannot manage well. Behold, our Most Serene Lord has ordered an ape to become a lion. A lion indeed the ape may be called at the imperial command, but a lion he cannot become."

The Pope-elect attempted flight. But the prefect of Rome had his suspicions and set a watch on all the city gates. Some merchants, however, were prevailed upon to bear him past the guards, hidden away among their bales of cloth. For three days he wandered in the woods without food, and in danger from thieves and Lombards. Meanwhile Rome was in consternation. The churches were crowded all day, a fast was proclaimed, and messengers scoured the country in pursuit. On the third night, a supernatural radiance betrayed the fugitive in the cavern where he lay hid. He was led back to Rome in triumph, and the joy of the citizens knew no bounds.

As quickly as possible he was ordained priest and consecrated bishop. On the 3rd of September, 590, he was solemnly enthroned in St. Peter's. With a heavy heart he wrote to claim the prayers of his friends.

"Worthless and weak," he told John the Faster, "I have taken charge of an old ship very much battered. The waters break in everywhere, the rotten timbers creak daily in the storm. For God's sake give me by your prayers a helping hand."

He elaborates this metaphor of a sinking ship when writing to St. Leander.

"The waves break against the prow, clouds

of sea-foam dash over the curved bulwarks on the sides, a squall bursts upon the stern. And I, whom God has placed at the helm, have to tack sideways, lest through my negligence the leak in the hold increase. Weeping I look back upon the peaceful haven I have left so far behind, and I groan in spirit as I catch glimpses through the haze of the port towards which I am steering this wind-buffeted, crazy old boat. O dearest brother, if you love me, help me by your prayers to battle with the waves. In proportion as you help my endeavour, may you yourself be strengthened in your own work."

"I complain, and not lightly of your love," he wrote to the Consul Gregory, the man in Rome who had been most active in procuring his election. "You knew I sought seclusion, and you have dragged me out to meet trouble. God reward you eternally for your good intention, and may it be His good pleasure to deliver me from the dangers into which you have thrust me! For my sins I am made a bishop, and not alone of the Romans, but of the Lombards who acknowledge no right save the sword, and whose favours are torture. See to what a pass your patronage has reduced me!"

CHAPTER VII

Pastoral Rule.

ELSEWHERE in his letters we read how Gregory undertook the burden of episcopacy with a sick heart, shackled with the chain of dignity, choked with business, driven distracted with the tumult of worldly affairs, the eyes of his soul darkened with grief. "The base height of external eminence" is for him no true promotion, since it draws him from the Face of the Lord into the exile of earthly employment.

He was especially distressed when bishops wrote to congratulate him; as though their own experience in "the citadel of teaching" had failed to convince them of its perils and responsibility. John, Bishop of Ravenna, wrote in another strain, blaming the new Pope for his reluctance to dare a duty so clearly imposed upon him by the Will of God.

Gregory answered John by his book *On Pastoral Rule*, "a golden book," which it took him four years to write. He sent copies to his friends in different lands. St. Leander circulated it in Spain. The emperor Maurice had it translated into Greek. St. Augustine carried it

into England. Exactly two centuries after its first appearance, Alcuin wrote to the Archbishop of York:

"Wherever you go, let the handbook of the holy Gregory go with you. Read it, and re-read it often. It is a mirror of the pontifical life and a cure for every wound inflicted by diabolical deceit."

Alcuin's pupil, Charlemagne, ranked it with the Book of Canons; for he ordered copies of both to be given to bishops at their consecration, and a solemn promise to be exacted that they would conform their conduct, teaching and decisions to its maxims. Alfred the Great translated it as "a book most needful for men to read," and sent a copy of his version to every bishop in his dominions. It is the book of which Ozanam said, "It made the bishops who have made modern nations." A few quotations, strung together, show its scope more interestingly than a formal synopsis.

"The solidity of inward fear" is, in St. Gregory's mind, a bishop's first essential. "Those who stumble on level ground should shrink back from the verge of a precipice. Arrogance cannot teach humility, nor can one who lives perversely instruct in righteousness." True humility, on the other hand, "is averse from stubbornness, and he who abounds in virtue

accepts the supreme rule enjoined him, fleeing the responsibility in his heart, and against his will obeying."

A bishop's life must serve as a pattern for his flock, with nothing to put him to the blush before them. He must be pure in heart. "The hand that would cleanse from dirt must needs itself be clean. And how dare he plead with God for others, if God's anger be not placated against himself?" He must be discreet in silence, profitable in speech. "For careless, unseasonable babbling robs good advice of its effect, and unseasonable silence leaves in error men who might have been instructed. . . .

"He must be all in all to his flock, joined to the highest and lowest in bonds of charity—a charity so well ordered as to keep his heart firmly anchored in God, even when he leaves the safe haven of prayer to sympathise with his neighbours in their infirmities. All men are born equal, but sin has sunk some below the level of others. These he must discreetly correct, with a father's loving rigour that leaves no sting behind, only an increase of reverential awe. . . .

"It behoves a good ruler to desire to please men, and by sweetness of character to win them to love truth. For it is hard for a preacher who is not loved to be heard gladly, however wise

may be his warnings. Nor is a bishop heard willingly, if he reproves the misdeeds of transgressors and makes no effort to supply them with the necessaries of life. The word of doctrine maketh no way into the soul of a man in want if the hand of mercy commend it not to his mind."

And lastly, a bishop must meditate daily on Holy Scripture, so that "he who is drawn to the old life by intercourse with worldlings may be continually renewed in the love of heavenly things by the breathings of contrition. For indeed it is needful, when we are flattered for the abundance of our virtues, that the soul should dwell on her own weak points. And thus the heart, broken by the remembrance of faults and omissions, may shine with increased beauty in the eyes of the God who loveth the lowly. For this cause, Almighty God is wont to leave the souls of rulers imperfect in some small measure, that the while they shine before men with wondrous virtues they may themselves be wearied with their own irksome imperfections; and that, whereas they still toil in their strife against the lower difficulties, they may not dare to vaunt themselves upon their high achievements."

On this note of humility St. Gregory ends: "Behold my good friend, thou whose rebuke

has constrained me to write, behold this portrait of a fair person, which I, a foul painter, have presumed to paint. I direct others to the shore of perfection, while I myself am tossing on the waves of sin. My own weight drags me downward. But do thou stretch forth the hand of thy worthiness and hold me up by the plank of thy prayer."

The saint did not live otherwise than as he wrote. As soon as he became Pope, he called to his side from St. Andrew's Maximianus the abbot, and Marinianus, Augustine the prior, and Meletus, the two first in training for the sees of Syracuse and Ravenna, the others for the English apostolate. With these and others of his old community he continued, as far as possible, the monastic routine: meals in common, set times for prayer and study and interchange of ideas. He admitted also to his household some learned and holy Roman priests, on whose advice and intimacy he set a high value. Among the inferior clerics we note Emilianus, the short-hand writer, who took down his homilies; Claudius the scribe, who preserved his writings for the Church, and Peter, the trusty business man whom he has immortalized in his *Dialogues*. All the domestics in the pontifical palace wore the tonsure, and all had to converse in cultured Latin.

At the synod held in 595, the year he published his book *On Pastoral Rule,* St. Gregory was in a position to insert among the decrees, " Certain persons shall be selected from among the clergy or the monks to attend upon the Pontiff in his bedchamber, so that the life of the ruler may be witnessed in all its privacy by men who can take example, and profit by the sight of his progress in virtue."

Life in the Lateran palace was of the simplest. The Pope's liveries were monastic in cut and texture. His own robes of state were such as he deemed suitable to a successor of the Apostles. John the Deacon tells of his pallium, woven of white wool with no marks of the needle in it, of his pectoral of thin silver, hung from the neck by a piece of poor cloth, of his narrow belt only a thumb's-width broad.

" Although we do not care for presents," he once wrote to a bishop, " we have thankfully received the costly garments, embroidered with palm-branches, which Your Fraternity has sent us. But that you may be at no loss, we have sold them for a fair price, which we forward to Your Fraternity."

Yet, when he appeared in public, there was nothing sordid or undignified, nothing to excite remark or ridicule.

" You have sent me one sorry horse and five

excellent asses," he wrote to the agent of his estates in Sicily. "The horse I cannot ride, because it will not bear my weight; and the asses, good as they are, I cannot ride, because they are asses."

He kept a frugal table, but on this we need not dwell. A man of his gouty habit was, of necessity, abstemious. The thin, sour wine, the usual drink of monks and peasants, was in his case wholly unsuited. He had to send to Alexandria for a special resinous wine, called cognidium, and this was to him no small humiliation.

But however simple the fare provided, his staff of cooks and scullions were kept busy. For St. Gregory entertained twelve poor men to dinner every day, and often ate with them himself. Moreover he never sat down to table without sending cartloads of cooked provisions to the sick and infirm throughout the streets and lanes of all the city districts. Families reduced in circumstances and ashamed to beg, received a dish from his own table, delivered at their doors; and he wished them to welcome it more as a mark of honour than as an alms.

"An offering from the goods of Blessed Peter the Apostle," he wrote, "should always be received as a great blessing."

And again: "We have ordered Adrian, our

business man, to pay ten *solidi* a year to the monastery you have built in Catania. Do not be offended. It is not a personal present from me to you, but a gift from St. Peter, Prince of the Apostles."

He answered one Julian who asked for help: "I opened your letter with pleasure and I folded it up with grief. For it showed me that you have kept hidden from me something I should long ere this have known. You must have little love for a man with whom you are so bashful. It is a great help to me when you give me opportunities to do a kindness. Your bashfulness is all the more blameworthy, because you know I have nothing of my own. I only administer, as bishop, the property of the poor."

In his dealings with another section of the poor of Christ, St. Gregory deemed it a more blessed thing to give than to receive. There were three thousand "handmaids of God" in Rome, to whom he gave eighty pounds a year and fifteen pounds in gold to buy blankets. He wrote concerning them to the royal lady Theoctista:

"Their life is so noble, so given to tears and abstinence, that I believe, but for them, not one of us in Rome could have survived so many years amid the swords of the Lombards."

The long series of wars had left the Pope the

one rich man in Rome. All the wealthy patrician families had died out, or removed to Constantinople or sunk to poverty. The city was crowded, moreover, with refugees. Even in its palmy days it was never a trade centre, and had no staple manufactures. The citizens looked to the Government for bread as well as for games. The emperors were still supposed to allot corn from the State granaries; but the Egyptian tribute had, by degrees, been diverted to Constantinople, and the imperial officials in Sicily were broken reeds to lean upon. The Popes had to shoulder the burden themselves, or see the people perish with hunger.

"If the supply from Sicily again falls short," St. Gregory warned the Praetor of that island, "it will be the death, not of one person only, but of all our citizens."

And, as his letter produced no effect, he wrote to the manager of his own estates there: "With fifty pounds of gold, buy corn and store it in Sicily, in places where it will not spoil, so that in February we may send ships across to fetch it. But in case we fail to send them, provide the ships yourself, and with God's help send us the corn in February."

His experience as prefect of the city and as regionary deacon now stood St. Gregory in good stead. The Popes, his predecessors, had

well organised the distribution of relief. Each charitable institute and each regionary office had to keep accounts very carefully. Thus there was no waste or overlapping, when on the first of every month he distributed to the poor that part of the Church revenue which was paid in kind.

"Corn throughout the year, and in their several seasons wine, cheese, vegetables, bacon, fish and oil were doled out most discreetly by this father of Our Lord's household. But pigments and other more delicate articles of commerce he offered as tokens of esteem to citizens of rank."

As for the money-rents of his estates and the *patrimonies* of the Roman Church, these he divided among the different charities four times a year: at Easter, on the Feast of St. Peter in June, on the anniversary of his own consecration in September, and on St. Andrew's Day, the patronal feast of his monastery. In this quarterly distribution he was mainly guided by the register of Pope Gelasius. But he had a register of his own compiled as well. "On it were set down the names of all persons of either sex, of all ages and professions, both in Rome and in the suburbs, in the neighbouring towns, and even in the distant cities on the coast, together with details about their families, their

circumstances, and the payments which they received. When a poor man was found dead of starvation in one of the back streets of Rome, the pope abstained from saying Mass."

With so much misery around him for which to cater, St. Gregory had no funds at his disposal to lay out on bricks and mortar. He had done his church building when Abbot of St. Andrew's. His only architectural venture as Pope was the hospice for pilgrims at Jerusalem, which he built and equipped, and sent out Abbot Probus to organize on the lines of the hospices which other Popes had founded in Rome. His zeal for the beauty of God's House had to content itself with the care he took to reduce to system the rites of public worship, sifting prudently the material at his disposal, and adding of his own.

This remark applies equally to the Sacramentary and Antiphonary which bear his name, and to the Schools for Choristers which he set up in his own palace, and in the basement of St. Peter's.

The Roman patricians gladly sent their sons to these schools, but the best of the pupils were recruited from the destitute orphans who, as the phrase went, depended on the "fosterage of St. Peter" for their chance in life. St. Gregory often sought relief from his cares and bodily

pain by presiding at the singing lessons in the Lateran palace. For centuries the very couch was shown on which he reclined, and the rod with which he beat time and kept the unruly boys in order.

Slowly under his guidance the Gregorian Chant was evolved, "full, sonorous, sweet, behooving." This was gradually to supersede all over the West the elaborate Ambrosian harmonies which had so charmed and alarmed St. Austin in the early days of his conversion at Milan. Pope Leo IV wrote in 850 to rebuke an abbot slow to adopt it, and therefore "differing not only from the Roman See, but from almost all who in the Latin tongue sing the praises of the Eternal King." About the same date John the Deacon wrote amusingly of "the light-minded clowns" in the Black Forest who could not readily "accommodate the thunder of their voices" to the sustained sweetness and modulation of the Gregorian Chant.

"When the barbarous roughness of bibulous throats tries to produce soft singing with inflexions and accents, it makes their voices grate like the rumbling of waggons coming down hill. Those who listen are not soothed, but exasperated and provoked to clamorous interruption."

But John the Deacon's ear and taste had been

trained at the Pope's own school in the Lateran palace.

According to the letter of Leo IV, St. Gregory had congregational singing in view when "he invented plain chant, so that by artificially modulated sound he might attract to Church services not only the clergy but also the uncultured." Another motive, which he himself avows, is that the deacons may devote themselves to their proper functions, preaching and the distribution of alms, instead of "spending over much time on the modulation of their voice." And so he ordains in a synodal decree (595):

"The sacred ministers at the altar shall not sing during Mass. The deacons may read the Gospel, but the psalms and other lessons shall be rendered by sub-deacons and those in Minor Orders." He will have at the altar none of "those careless ministers whose singing delights the people, but whose conduct irritates God."

The Antiphonary, which bears his name, contains the musical portions of the liturgy arranged for singing by alternate choirs. At least eight of the hymns are attributed to St. Gregory himself, including the two still in use at Sunday Vespers, *Audi Benigne Conditor* and *Lucis Creator Optime.*

St. Gregory's Antiphonary was mainly com-

piled by him from material which existed two hundred and seventy years before his time, but which he reduced to system and rendered easier to sing. His Sacramentary, on the other hand, contains much that was afterwards introduced into the liturgy, the Mass for his own feast, for instance, and the Blessing of Ashes on Ash Wednesday. For Lent with him began on Quadragesima Sunday. He remarks in one of his homilies how its thirty-six fasting days form a tithe of the year.

Duchesne defines the Sacramentary as "The Pope's book, containing the prayers which the Pope has to use at the ceremonies over which it is his custom to preside," St. Gregory based his Sacramentary on that of Pope Gelasius, omitting a good deal, and adding a little of his own. In the Ordinary of the Mass, he formally sanctioned the *Kyrie*, inserted in the *Hanc Igitur* the words, "diesque nostros in tua pace disponas: atque ab aeterna damnatione nos eripi, et in electorum tuorum jubeas grege numerari," and altered the position of the *Pater Noster*, "so that we may say over His very Body and Blood the prayer which our Redeemer Himself composed." He forbade sub-deacons to wear the chasuble. He enjoined a more frequent use of *Alleluia*.

St. Gregory's Sacramentary also settled a

which of the churches within and without the city walls the Pope was to celebrate Mass on the chief festivals of the year, on the Ember Days, and on every day in Lent. For he had noticed how the procession on St. Mark's Day had impressed the people, and so he revived the good old custom of the *Stations* which had fallen into disuse amid the troubles of the times. At a specified church the Pope was met by the clergy and the people, and they all went together—he on horseback, they on foot—singing and praying through the streets to the church of the Station. Here he was received with lights and incense and elaborate ritual; and Mass at once began, during which he received from the faithful offerings of bread and wine, and administered Holy Communion.

A picture in St. Peter's still commemorates an incident at one of these Stations. St. Gregory noticed a woman of senatorial rank who smiled as he pronounced over her the usual formula before Holy Communion: "The Body of Our Lord Jesus Christ preserve thy soul." Quickly withdrawing his hand, he placed the Sacred Host upon the altar, and called upon the matron, before all the people, to account for her unseemly mirth.

"I smiled," she replied, "because I knew that I had made with my own hands this morning

the Bread which you offered me as the Body of Our Lord."

Without a word St. Gregory knelt before the altar and bowed his head in prayer. And while he prayed and the people prayed with him, the Sacred Host appeared as Flesh before the eyes of the whole assembly. " And by showing It to the woman he recalled her to the grace of belief."

At these Stations the Pope usually preached, applying the Gospel incidents and precepts to the ordinary circumstances of a Christian life. Allegorical allusions abound in these sermons, according with the taste of the times, and appealing to the more cultured among his hearers. But there was always a fund of homely anecdote as well, to interest the unlearned, " and persuade them by gentle imitation to mount to higher things."

One whole section of his book on Pastoral Rule deals with the difficulty of preaching to a mixed audience :

" For a gentle whistling which stilleth horses, setteth dogs astir, and the medicine which abateth one disease giveth force to another, and babes are killed by the bread which sustaineth the life of men. . . . The preacher has to teach humility to the proud without increasing the terrors of the timid, to exhort the miserly to spend without encouraging the

spendthrift to squander. He must understand that he is not to strain the mind of the hearer beyond its strength, lest the string of the soul break if stretched beyond what it can endure. All deep things ought to be covered over where there are many hearers. . . . The Truth by His own Mouth commands the faithful and wise steward, whom the Lord setteth over His household to give them their measure of corn in season."

The preacher must, like St. Paul, be all things to all men, a debtor to the wise and to the unwise.

"The wise, for the most part, are converted by force of argument, the unwise more usually by examples. To the one class, doubtless, it is profitable to fall beaten in their own disputations. For the other it ofttimes suffices to know the praiseworthy deeds of others."

Forty of St. Gregory's homilies have come down to us, taken down in shorthand even while he spoke, or dictated by him and read in his presence when he was too ill to preach. All forty were carefully revised in his own hand, and an authentic transcript deposited in the Roman archives. For unauthorised versions had gone abroad among the Churches, and he would not hold himself responsible for the action of "those starving men who will not wait until their food be cooked," but took down

his sermons hastily, and circulated them without his leave " to be eaten half raw."

This was in the year 593. Towards the end of his life he revised in like manner his twenty-two discourses on the Book of Ezechiel. This series was preached while Agilulf, King of the Lombards, was laying waste the land round Rome, and it is interesting to the historian from its many references to current events. We content ourselves with one short quotation :

" When in the monastery I was able to keep my tongue from idle talk and fix my mind on prayer. But since the pastoral burden presses upon the shoulders of my heart, my soul lives abroad amid conflicting cares and cannot concentrate upon itself. For I have to superintend the business of churches and of monasteries, and to deliberate upon the conduct and actions of individuals. Sometimes I have to take thought for the citizens, sometimes to groan over the incursions of the enemy, sometimes to defend from prowling wolves the flock committed to my care. Sometimes I have to keep to their duty those who ought to assist us, sometimes I must suffer plunderers with evenness of mind, sometimes for the sake of charity I must resist them.

" How then can I be expected to prepare myself for preaching with the reverent composure that befits the Word of God ? "

CHAPTER VIII

WITH THE BISHOPS OF THE WEST.

SO many-sided were St. Gregory's activities that it is not advisable to keep to the strict order of time when writing his life. In the last chapter we have watched him at work in Rome, a model bishop both in word and deed. In this one our purpose is to show his care for the bishops whom he describes as "belonging to us," and his dealings with the other ecclesiastical provinces in Western Europe.

Benedict XIV, our great authority on Canonisation, has a whole treatise on the duties of a Pope's state of life. "The Sovereign Pontiff," he says, "is the Shepherd and Ruler of the whole Church. He is besides, Bishop of Rome, Metropolitan of the Roman Province, Primate of Italy and Patriarch of the West."

Like the other patriarchs he has the right to wear and to confer the pallium. It is outside the scope of this book to trace the vicissitudes in the history of this web of white wool embroidered with dark crosses, which from early times was the symbol of the fulness of episcopal power. In the sixth century its use was

restricted, in the West, to the Sovereign Pontiff and to those bishops who were immediately dependent on his authority : his own suffragans of the Roman province, for instance, the other Italian metropolitans, the Apostolic Delegates in other lands whom he appointed his *vicars* to keep him in touch with local bishops. Thus in 595 our saint granted the pallium to the Bishop of Arles, empowering him as " Vicar Apostolic " in Austrasia, Burgundy and Aquitaine, to settle minor questions by his own authority, and questions of greater difficulty in a synod of twelve bishops. Only matters of supreme importance were to be referred to Rome.

In 599 St. Leander of Seville received his pallium, " only to be worn while saying Mass." St. Gregory writes on this occasion, " While sending it I ought also to send you word how you should live. I do not, however, for your virtuous life has anticipated my words."

The Bishop of Cartagena was the Pope's representative in the part of Spain not subject to the Visigoths. He received with his pallium a copy of the book *On Pastoral Rule,* and studied it to some purpose.

" Necessity compels us to do what you say ought not to be done," he wrote in return. " You say that the uninstructed must not be ordained. But let Your Prudence consider

whether it may not be enough to know Jesus Christ and Him Crucified. Otherwise we have no one here duly qualified; and unless the unlearned (like myself !) are ordained, there will be no one to say Mass and administer the Sacraments."

The humble primate was indeed no match in legal acumen for the insolent and avaricious governor of Roman Spain, "the glorious Commitiolus" who contrived to have two bishops deposed on a charge of treasonable correspondence with the enemies of the State. St. Gregory sent a special envoy, John the Defensor, with powers to re-open the case and with very definite instructions how to proceed. He was first to satisfy himself that the trial had been conducted in legal form.

"Diligently enquire whether the accusers were distinct from the witnesses, whether the gravity of the case entailed as penalty exile or degradation, whether the witnesses were on oath and gave their testimony in presence of the accused, and whether the accused were allowed to answer in their own defence. Examine thoroughly into the antecedents of accusers and witnesses, whether they were needy men, likely to take bribes, whether they had any grudge against the accused, whether they spoke from their own knowledge, or whether their evidence

was mere hearsay. Make certain that the judgment was in writing, and delivered in open court."

Enclosed were extracts from the Justinian Code, which decreed heavy penalties against any magistrate who presumed to try a bishop in the secular courts without an express command from the emperor.

The incident illustrates St. Gregory's care to work in harmony with the civil power. The North of Africa was again under imperial control, and here he was far more hampered by precedent than elsewhere in the West. The African metropolitans were called primates, and save in the province of Carthage the primacy was not attached to any see, but went by seniority in consecration. Hence it often devolved on old men, who had outlived their energy, or on bishops whose dioceses consisted of a handful of unimportant villages.

St. Gregory did not deem it wise to insist on any change of system. But he let it be known that he reposed great confidence in Columbus, a Numidian bishop, " utterly devoted mind and heart and soul to the Apostolic See." He wrote to Adeodatus, Primate of Numidia :

" The life and conduct of Columbus have been so approved by us in all things, that we are certain anything you do with his

approval will be darkened by no shadow of a fault."

In Africa, moreover, he had Donatists to deal with, and the Donatists were a power in politics by reason of their wealth. And alas! there were bishops to be found who stretched forth to these schismatics the right hand of fellowship. In one diocese priests of this sect obtained leave by bribery to officiate in the churches; and Catholics, who passed for pious, took money for allowing them to re-baptize their children and their slaves. The laws of the Empire forbade expressly such mischievous propaganda; but the prefects and the proctors turned a deaf ear to the Pope's remonstrances. Donatist gold made it worth their while to be lenient.

St. Gregory would never promote to a primacy any bishop who had once been a Donatist. "It is not seemly," he wrote, "that such men should take rank above other bishops who have been trained from infancy in the Catholic Faith." He appealed to the emperor "to cleanse the Church in Africa from the venom of diabolic fraud," since "the bribes of the heretics so prevail in the province that the Catholic Faith is publicly put up for sale."

By the emperor's command a Council met at Carthage in 594. Here it was ruled that bishops who neglected to seek out and punish heretics

should be deprived of their sees. St. Gregory considered the decree unjust.

"It is best, dearest Brother," he wrote to Dominic, Primate of Carthage, "and more becoming to your position, if you condescend sometimes to the opinion of those of inferior dignity. You will unite the Churches more easily to resist error, when in a priestly manner you strive to preserve ecclesiastical concord. . . . Just as we defend our own rights, so do we preserve those of the other Churches. I do not, through partiality, grant to any Church more than it deserves; nor do I, through ambition, refuse to any one of them what belongs to it of right. Rather do I desire to honour my brother bishops in every way, and study that each may be advanced in dignity, so long as there can be no just opposition to it on the part of another."

We shall see how his conduct tallied with his teaching, if we watch him at work in Italy, where the Pope himself acted as metropolitan over the central and southern sees. The bishops were expected to visit Rome once a year to confer with him personally on the affairs of their dioceses. Custom, however, allowed three years to elapse between the visits *ad limina Apostolorum* of the Sicilian bishops; and St. Gregory saw fit to lengthen this interval to five years, because the Government officials in the

island made difficulties about the journey, and because there were risks from marauders on the road.

But he kept himself accurately informed of everything affecting the thirteen Sicilian dioceses. Of these Syracuse was the most important, for that city was the headquarters of the imperial governor. At the head of this See St. Gregory placed Maximianus, who had been at one time his own religious superior, at another a monk under his obedience. He named Maximianus his Vicar* in the island, a personal mark of esteem, he notes, and not in virtue of his official position. The Church of Syracuse was not, on this account, to claim any superiority over the rest of the Sicilian Churches.

Maximianus was useful to the Pope in many ways, especially in his dealings with the Church in Africa. But, like other monk-bishops in this pontificate, he had sometimes to receive firm letters from the Pope, who had been a monk himself. For instance:

"I have often rebuked you for over-hasty judgments. Yet now I learn that in a fit of anger you have excommunicated the most

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* Vicar Apostolic was the technical term denoting the Pope's representative in a country to safeguard the rights and fulness of authority of the Holy See.

reverend abbot Eusebius. It surprises me that his high character, his great age, his long sickness could not stay your anger. When God scourges a man with ill-health there is no need for men to lay on stripes. Let this excess make you more cautious in trivial cases, so that you may weigh matters well before passing judgment. As for Eusebius, console him by your gentle kindness for the irritation your anger has aroused."

Maximianus obeyed, but Eusebius refused to forgive. St. Gregory wrote to the old man, expressing sorrow for the harsh treatment meted out to him, and greater sorrow because he now put himself in the wrong.

" Those who stand up against superiors show that they despise being servants of God. He ought, by no means, to have done what he did ; but you ought to have borne it humbly. And when he offered you goodwill and communion, you should have been reconciled in all thankfulness."

When he needed a Syracusan priest elsewhere, the Pope did not hesitate to appeal to Maximianus.

" Felix, a man of consular rank and bearer of this letter, says there is in your district a priest worthy to be made a bishop. Your Fraternity will call him before you and diligently

examine him, at the peril of your own soul. Send him to us if you find him worthy, so that by God's help we may ordain him bishop for a place which we have provided."

In the sixth century bishops were elected by the clergy, the nobles and the people of their flock. St. Leo's rule still held good: "He that is to preside over all ought to be chosen by all." Only very urgent reasons could induce St. Gregory to interfere, even indirectly, with their choice. He usually sent a neighbouring bishop as visitor to the bereaved church. On one such occasion he wrote:

"We require Your Fraternity zealously to charge the clergy and the people to lay aside all party spirit, and to choose as bishop some one worthy of the office, and eligible according to Canon Law. And when he is elected let him come to us for consecration, bringing with him his papers, made out in due form and signed by the electors, and an attesting letter from Your Charity. . . . Take care that no layman presume to aspire to the rank of bishop, whatever be the virtue of his life. Otherwise you yourself will run the risk of being degraded from your office. The which God forbid."

The metropolitan had the right of veto. In cases where electors were culpably negligent St. Gregory did not hesitate to appoint, on his

own responsibility, such a bishop as he knew would be acceptable and efficient.

"We do not approve of Occleatinus," he wrote to the Church of Rimini," and the people must not think of him any more. If they cannot find any one in this Church who is fit for the office, the bearer of this letter will suggest a candidate. He has my instructions."

No fault in any of his suffragans escaped his watchful eye. He wrote to the Bishop of Reggio :

"Visitors to Rome, my brother, have told me that you are very earnest in your works of mercy, and I thank God for it. But it troubles me not a little to hear that you yourself have mentioned your good deeds to so many people. My dear brother, when your actions are so good, you should guard with jealous care the goodness of your heart, lest the desire of pleasing men creep in and all your labour in well-doing avail you nought."

A bishop in Apulia is blamed for the vagaries of an "escaped nun."

"To your great disgrace, the daughter of Tullianus, of honoured memory, has thrown off her monastic habit and written us a perverse letter. If you knew how to act as a bishop, we should have heard of that wicked woman's punishment before we heard of her crime. But

you are so slothful, that unless you yourself suffer canonical correction you know not how to maintain discipline. We will, please God, instruct you effectively on some fitting occasion."

Negligence in almsgiving is dealt with no less severely. The Bishop of Naples received an order to distribute four hundred gold pieces among priests, beggars and deserving poor, in the presence of the Pope's delegate, Anthemius. A little later, Anthemius has to rebuke the bishop, in front of the clergy and the notables of his diocese, and if this strong measure does not restrain him from his customary faults, he is to be sent, under escort, to Rome, " to learn there what a bishop ought to do and how to do it."

For strange tales reached the Pope about Bishop Paschasius. " He bestows no love nor care on his church or on the monks in his diocese, or on the poor. He gives no help to the oppressed who seek redress at his hands. Worse still, he utterly refuses to take advice from prudent men. All his time goes in ship-building, which has already cost him over four hundred pounds. He goes daily down to the shore with two or three clerics, in so mean a guise that he has become a laughing-stock to his own people, and strangers despise him as

lacking in the dignity which befits a bishop. This state of things, you know, is not without your fault, for you have delayed to rebuke and restrain him, as it was your duty to do."

Picenius of Amalfi was fond of gadding abroad. His people followed the bad example set by their chief, and left their homes at the mercy of the Lombards.

"See that he resides in his diocese as becomes a bishop," wrote Gregory to Anthemius. "If, when you have threatened him, he does not amend, send him at once to a monastery, and write to us for further orders."

Bishops might not leave their flock for any length of time without the consent of their immediate superior. Picenius was not the only one to ignore this rule. And thus we find St. Gregory writing to Syagrius, Bishop of Autun:

"Menas, a bishop of the Roman Church, has fled from our jurisdiction to your city. He has shown such lightness in his conduct that the name of bishop is to him not an honour but a burden. We count it shame to hear things of him which we severely reprehend in priests of other provinces. Your Fraternity will compel him to return to us as soon as possible. Moreover, report reaches us that one Theodore, a suffragan of our most reverend brother Constantius, of the Church of Milan, has settled

in your city, so as to avoid his correction. We request Your Fraternity diligently to seek him out and send him back to his diocese."

Very intimate indeed was the connection between the Pope and the other metropolitans of Italy : the Archbishops of Ravenna, of Milan, of Aquileia, of Cagliari and of Salona. The term archbishop was not then used in the West, but we risk the anachronism for the sake of clearness.

St. Gregory begs John of Ravenna to help him to administer his own province in places where the Lombards made travelling difficult and dangerous.

" Your Fraternity will take charge of any bishops of ours who are hindered from coming here. But I would not have them harassed or fatigued unduly, so they must not be summoned to Ravenna for their causes. Admonish them by letter, if you find them blameworthy. Serious faults among them we wish you to report accurately to us, so that your testimony may strengthen our decision when, after due deliberation, we pass judgment, with the help of God, and in conformity with Canon Law."

In another letter he takes John himself to task. " It grieves me that Your Fraternity writes to me in flattering terms, and you speak quite otherwise about me. It grieves me too

to learn that my brother John has often on his lips those jokes which the sons of notaries delight in, that he speaks stinging words as if he enjoyed their wit. I execrate his masterful tone to his clergy, and the humiliating services he exacts from those of his household."

The last of John's transgressions he considers "first indeed by the gravity of its pride. . . . None of his predecessors ever presumed to wear the pallium outside the Church. Our legates tell me that he himself never presumed to do so in the time of our predecessors. But now he does it frequently to show his contempt for me. . . . I give thanks to God that, when I heard of this, the Lombards were between me and the city of Ravenna. Otherwise I might have shown to men how severe I know I can be."

The letter ends in gentler strain. "Believe me, when I was exalted to my present position I was full of good will for Your Fraternity and held you in high esteem. Had you wished it, you would have found in me a brother eager to forestall you in marks of affection. But knowing how you talked and how you acted I had to hold back. Now I beseech you to amend all the things I have mentioned. Especially do I implore you, to be wholly sincere with your brethren, say not one thing and have another in your heart. Allow me to be your friend.

You will find my brotherly affection useful for you, both in this life and in the life to come."

The archbishops of Ravenna attended the Roman synods every year, and it was one of their privileges to receive consecration at the hands of the Pope himself. On the death of John in 595, St. Gregory wrote :

" We were anxious to comply with the wishes of His Excellency the Patrician in favour of Donatus the Archdeacon. But since it is very perilous to the soul to ordain without careful consideration, we made it our business to investigate thoroughly his life and character. And as we found much which disqualifies him, we had to notify the Patrician that we could not consent to his consecration. Nor did we venture to ordain the priest John. He did not know the psalms : this shows that he is wanting in zeal to improve himself. The delegates from Ravenna confessed they could find in their own Church no one fit for the office, whereat they and I were greatly grieved. At last, with united voices, they petitioned me earnestly for my venerable brother, the priest Marinianus, who lived for long years with me in my monastery. He tried various means to escape the dignity, but in the end they prevailed upon him to accept. As we know him well and have found

him zealous for winning souls, we ordained him without delay."

At first Marinianus bade fair to be the square man in the round hole. A twelvemonth after his consecration, St. Gregory wrote to the Abbot Secundus :

"Talk to my brother and fellow-bishop, Marinianus, and stir him up, for I suspect he has gone to sleep. I was speaking the other day with some poor pilgrims, questioning them on their journey and on alms which had helped them on their way. I anxiously inquired how much they had received from Marinianus, and they made answer, 'He told us "I have nothing for you!"' I am indeed surprised that a man who has clothes, who has silver, who has food, finds nothing to give the poor! Now that he is a bishop he must alter his ideas. He has other duties besides study and prayer. He must not fancy that he is free to sit by himself all day, with his hands joined. He must help those in want, he must feel for the distress of others, if he does not, he is no true bishop. I have written to him for the good of his soul; but I suppose he has not troubled even to read my letter, for he has answered me never a word. So now, when I write to him, it is merely on matters of business: I refrain from advice, I am not bound to weary myself dictating a letter

to a man who will not read it. So I beg Your Affection to talk with him privately and admonish him how to act, lest (which God forbid !) he lose by his negligence the life he once possessed."

Secundus must have talked to some purpose, for soon the monks of the district lodged a complaint at Rome that they were overburdened with parish work, and blamed unfairly when things went wrong. This time the monk-Pope wrote himself directly to the monk-bishop and in terms of sharp rebuke :

" Do not delay to correct these abuses, now that you are warned for the second time. If we find you still negligent (we do not think it will be the case), we shall be compelled to provide for the peace of the monasteries in another way. We will not allow God's servants to be thus oppressed."

When a vacancy occurred at Milan, St. Gregory wrote to the clergy : " Long ago I resolved never to interfere in the interests of any candidate. But I shall follow your election with my prayers, that God may grant you a pastor who by word and example will guide you on the road which leads to life."

But however sure he is that " The Divine Shepherd provides such shepherds as the flock deserves," he would have the electors weigh

well the qualifications of their future bishop, "For when he is once set over you, he can no longer be judged by you; therefore you should examine him thoroughly now. Once your pastor is consecrated, give yourselves to him heart and soul, and in his person serve Almighty God."

The Milanese clergy elected Constantius, a personal friend of St. Gregory, who at once issued orders "to have him consecrated by his suffragans, as ancient use demands, with the assent of our authority and with the help of God. Thus will the Apostolic See uphold its own rights and preserve intact the rights which it has conceded to others."

It fell to his duty, as primate of Italy, to rebuke Natalis, Archbishop of Salona, which was the metropolitan See for the eastern shores of the Adriatic.

"Many people who have come from your city, my dearest brother, say that you neglect your pastoral charge, that you give yourself up to feasting and do not preserve your self-respect."

Natalis in his reply quoted the case of Abraham, who entertained angels unawares.

"We should not blame Your Holiness for the feast," wrote Gregory in return, "if we thought you had always angels for your guests. Your Holiness does well to praise banquets where

charity abounds. Those feasts truly proceed from charity when the life of the absent is not picked to pieces, where no one is mocked, where there is no idle gossip on frivolous topics, where a holy book is read aloud, where no more is eaten or drunk than is needed to refresh the body and keep it in health for the practice of virtue."

Before and after he became Pope, St. Gregory had intervened to compel Natalis to stay proceedings against Honoratus, his archdeacon.

" I believe you were angered against him, only because he hindered you from giving away to your kinsfolk the sacred vessels and ornaments of the sanctuary. And now I hear you strive speciously to degrade Honarius while seeming to promote him to higher dignity. Thus you are able to put in his place as archdeacon one who would connive at your malpractices. . . . Let Your Fraternity come to a right frame of mind and restore Honoratus to his former position as soon as you receive this letter. If you delay, we take from you the pallium, a privilege depending on the Apostolic See. If, after losing the pallium, you still persist in your pertinacity, we deprive you of participation in the Body and Blood of Our Lord. After this we shall have to scrutinize minutely whether you ought to be degraded from your rank as bishop. . . . Do not, dearest brother, provoke

us any further, lest you feel our severity very hard to endure."

Later he was able to write to John of Ravenna. "I was much grieved about our brother and fellow-bishop, Natalis, because I saw much pride in him. But since he has reformed his conduct, he has comforted my sorrow and won back my love."

Great delicacy was needed in dealing with the Church in Sardinia. St. Gregory sent a circular to the bishops there:

"Follow the ancient custom of your Churches in seeking permission from your metropolitan, according to our fixed rule, whenever necessity compels any one of you to leave your diocese. Do not presume to slight him by ignoring his authority, unless (which we do not expect) you have a cause against him to be judged by the Apostolic See."

The metropolitan in the island was Januarius, Archbishop of Cagliari, a very old man whose eccentricities gave great scandal. In 592 the appeals against him had grown so numerous that a commissioner came from Rome to investigate his disregard of justice. And St. Gregory wrote privately to caution Januarius: "If you find that you have taken anything, or hold anything unjustly, restore it before the trial begins."

A few years later he has to administer a sharp rebuke: "Such wickedness has been reported to us that unless we took a merciful view of it, we should smite you with a public anathema. We have heard that on the Lord's Day, before saying Mass, you went and ploughed your neighbour's corn-field, and that after Mass you dared to remove his boundary stones. We did not believe you could have been so wicked, until we questioned our son, Abbot Cyriacus, who was at Cagliari at the time this happened. Since we still wish to spare your grey hairs, be wise at last, old man, and restrain your scandalous levity and wickedness. The nearer you are to death, the more circumspect and afraid of sin you ought to be. Your punishment is already decreed, but we know your simplicity in your old age, and so, for the time being, we keep it back. But we excommunicate for the space of two months all those who have counselled you amiss, permitting them, however, to receive Holy Viaticum, should any mortal chance befall them during that space of time. But do you henceforth be wary and hold aloof from their advice. And look well to yourself, for if you learn evil from those to whom you ought to teach good, we shall spare you no longer."

"I chide and rebuke you," he wrote a month

later, " not out of harshness but out of brotherly love, because I wish Almighty God to see in you a bishop, not in name only which brings punishment, but in merit which brings reward."

A long series of letters deals in detail with the Churches of Sardinia, for the Pope had practically to act as their metropolitan. In the course of nature the archbishop's death seemed always near at hand, yet apparently he outlived St. Gregory, for one of our saint's last letters refers to him again.

" You tell us that our brother and fellow-bishop, Januarius, has often to interrupt his Mass and can scarcely, after long intervals, resume it again at the place where he broke off; and you say that many are in doubt whether they ought to receive Communion, when he has consecrated. Tell them to have no fear. The sickness of the celebrant does not affect the blessing of the sacred mystery. Still our brother ought certainly to be advised, in private, not to say Mass when he feels one of his attacks coming on, lest he expose himself to contempt, and cause offence in weak minds."

CHAPTER IX

TAMING THE TEUTONS.

AT any rate the senility of Januarius brought St. Gregory into closer touch with the Churches of Sardinia, and the many letters he had to write in connection with that island give us a glimpse of the confusion that everywhere prevailed.

Be it well understood all the West was in chaos. Whole districts were now desolate deserts, with ruined masonry to mark the site of villages and towns. Everywhere the centres of population had shifted. Roman Law gave place to feudal custom. Arian heretics held the ear of kings.

Everything was to reorganise, and the Pope had to see to everything in person. Unlike our present Holy Father, he had not at his disposal the elaborate machinery of the Roman Curia and Sacred Congregations. And the old order was giving place to new so quickly that precedents could only hamper.

The Visigoths were masters in Spain, the Franks in Gaul. Justinian's generals had won back the African Province from the Vandals.

These regions, at any rate, had their fate decided. But in Italy the war still raged.

St. Gregory was a young man of twenty-eight when "the unspeakable Lombards" swarmed through the passes of the Julian Alps—wild-looking, shaggy-bearded men, with the backs of their heads carefully shaved, "savage beyond even German fierceness." There was no one competent to oppose them in 568. Belisarius was dead, Narses in disgrace, Longinus the exarch skulked behind the ramparts of Ravenna, and made no attempt to conscript the manhood of Italy in defence of hearths and shrines.

Town after town opened its gates without a blow; and Alboïn, the Lombard King, gave each town, as it surrendered, to one or other of his captains with the title of Duke. Pavia alone held out for three years. Here Alboïn established his capital, and here he was murdered in 574, about the time when St. Gregory became a monk.

The wretched Italians in the conquered districts were now serfs bound to the soil, compelled to work day and night to secure a scanty livelihood; for they were forced to yield up to their cruel taskmasters one-third of the produce of their labour. And no man was safe in life, or limb, or chattel, from the local despot's whim.

Lombard Italy was divided up among thirty-six dukes, each irresponsible in his own strip of territory, each eying each askance, ready to quarrel with his fellow on the smallest provocation. Had the thirty-six confederated they could easily have subdued the whole of the peninsula.

Through ten most wretched years the Lombard warriors remained on the alert, in peril from the Franks and Allemanni in the emperor's pay—hardly in peril from the Hungarians and Avars so strong were their own precautions in the Eastern Alps—in peril, lest imperial Ravenna should shake off its lethargy and the much-enduring peasantry rise in revolt.

The two southernmost of the Lombard duchies, Benevent and Spoleto, proved especially troublesome to Rome. We have already spoken of their raids on the Campagna and their attacks on the city. Furthermore, the Via Flaminia between Rome and Ravenna ran through the territory of the Duke of Spoleto ; and the Duke of Benevent could at any time swoop down on the Appian Way and cut communications with the Adriatic.

It will be remembered that while St. Gregory was at Constantinople the emperor advised the Romans to hire the help of the Franks. King Childebert, nothing loth, marched his troops into Italy. It seemed that if he and the Viceroy

could concert their manœuvres, the Lombards would be surrounded and driven from the land. The common danger brought the thirty-six dukes together in council, and they agreed to take their orders from Authari, the young king whose claim to fealty and to tribute thay had for years ignored.

Authari decided on a policy of passive resistance. He collected provisions and shut himself up with his fighting men in Pavia. The dukes followed his example, each in his own strongest town. The peasants were left to starve in the open, and the Franks could find neither food nor provender to commandeer, no foe to meet in fair encounter. Pestilence followed in the wake of famine, and a little before Pope Pelagius died Childebert led back to Gaul the gaunt remnant of his troops.

The Lombard power was still unbroken. Never had their outlook seemed more hopeful, for a strong hand held the dukes in control. It was now the emperor's troops who kept in garrison, while the armies of King Authari raided the land. A column still marks the spot where his javelin fell when, so runs the story, he rode into the sea at the southernmost point of Italy, and hurled it with all his strength, exclaiming: "Thus far extends the limit of the Lombard rule." But the imperial fleet was

still supreme at sea, the imperial garrisons secure in their strongholds along the coast.

Authari was now in the zenith of his power. At Easter, 590, that very Easter when St. Gregory massed the Romans in penitential procession, he forbade the children of the Lombards to be baptised in the Catholic Faith.

"For this crime," writes St. Gregory, "the Divine Majesty extinguished him, so that he did not see another Easter."

His death occurred at Pavia on the 5th of September, two days before the new Pope was enthroned.

Authari left no son, only a fair young widow, Theodolind, daughter of Duke Garibald of Bavaria, a Catholic princess, as good and as gracious as she was comely. The Lombards decided that she should remain their queen. The thirty-six dukes voted that the royal crown should be given to whomsoever among them she should choose to wed.

Theodolind's choice fell on Agilulf, Duke of Turin. His first care was to make an advantageous peace with the Franks, and a truce with the exarch. But the dukes of Benevent and Spoleto refused to be bound by his acts. Their troops continued to terrorise the Campagna, and St. Gregory wrote in the bitterness of his soul:

"For my sins I find myself Bishop of the Lombards whose promises stab like swords."

He warned the exarch that Benevent was tampering with the Naples garrison. He counselled that the imperial troops should not always remain on the defensive, but by a vigorous thrust on Spoleto force the Lombards in the Campagna to face rearwards in order to defend their homes. Then, seeing that his advice availed nothing, he appointed, on his own responsibility, a military governor at Nepi, and replaced the governor of Naples by an abler man. The Theodosian regiment at Rome refused to mount guard because their pay was in arrears. St. Gregory quieted their clamour with money taken from the treasury of the Church. Henceforth they were the Pope's soldiers, not the Emperor's.

The exarch Romanus, who came into office in 590, was a weakling from whom nobody had anything to fear, always excepting the unfortunate Italians whom he oppressed. So long as the war kept away from the impregnable marshes around Ravenna, he was callous to the misery it dealt elsewhere: "the towns dispeopled, strongholds dismantled, the churches burnt and the monasteries plundered, the wild beasts roaming where the multitude of men did dwell." And wherever his tax-gatherers could

safely venture, he extorted money from the men whom he did nothing to defend.

"His ill-will to us," wrote St. Gregory, "is worse than the swords of the Lombards. The enemies who kill us outright are kinder than the State officials, who wear us out with their malice, their robberies and their frauds."

In 593 Romanus added perfidy to his other misdeeds. Despite the treaty he had signed with Agilulf, he took Perugia by treachery, and other towns as well. In revenge for this outrage the Lombard king marched an army upon Rome. From the battlements of his scantily garrisoned city the Pope saw with his own eyes "Romans tied by the neck like dogs" and led off to be sold as slaves to the Franks. He broke off abruptly his discourse in the Lateran basilica, where he was preaching his course of homilies on Ezechiel.

"Two things trouble me. The text is obscure, and news has reached me that King Agilulf has crossed the Po, on his way to besiege us. Judge, my brethren, how a poor soul thus weighed down with heaviness, can penetrate into such hidden mysteries! Let no man blame me if I preach no more. On all sides we are hemmed in with swords. On all sides death stands at the door. Some of our fellow-citizens have just come in to us with their hands lopped off.

They bear tidings that others have been carried into slavery, and others slain. What remains for us but to thank God with tears, under the scourges which we suffer for our sins. For sometimes our Heavenly Father feeds his children with bread, sometimes he corrects them with the rod, educating them by sorrows and by joys for the inheritance to be theirs throughout eternity."

But this tense anxiety did not last long. "On the steps of the basilica of Blessed Peter, Prince of the Apostles," St. Gregory faced Agilulf, as erstwhile Innocent had faced Alaric, and St. Leo the Great had faced Attila. And the King, "melted by Gregory's prayers and greatly moved by his religious commands," gave orders for the siege to cease. A truce was concluded, and the Pope guaranteed the yearly payment of five hundred gold pieces.

"The emperor has a paymaster for his troops in Ravenna," he wrote to the empress, "but he leaves me to be the paymaster of the Lombards in Rome."

The tribute was burdensome, but the peace it paid for was well worth while. The Emperor, however, blamed the Pope, and sharp letters were interchanged.

"I understand what your serene missives mean," wrote Gregory. "You find that I have acted like a fool, and you are right. If I had

not acted like a fool, I should not have borne all I have borne for your sake, amid the swords of the Lombards."

It was only when a more friendly exarch had replaced Romanus at Ravenna that a treaty could be arranged between the emperor and the king—the treaty known in history as "The Pope's Peace."

St. Gregory defined his attitude during the preliminaries as "intercessor and mediator." But his name does not appear among the signatures. He refused to sign, however urgently the Lombards might plead, "for they trusted his word, and despised the oaths of the emperor's officers." He feared the bad faith of both Greeks and Lombards, and refused to degrade the Holy See by becoming a partner to their evasions.

"Briefly point out to our Most Serene Lord," he instructs his apocrisarius, "that if I, his servant, had chosen to mix myself up with the downfall of the Lombards, that people to-day would have neither king, nor dukes nor counts. But, because I fear God, I dread being concerned in the death of any man."

Henceforward his relations were most friendly with the Court at Pavia. He writes to King Agilulf to restrain his roving bands, "chiefly those in this neighbourhood," and not to seek

" occasions for unpleasantness." He writes to Queen Theodolind :

" We entreat you to thank the King, your husband and our very excellent son, for the peace that he has made, and to move his soul (as you usually do) to keep this peace in time to come. Friendship with us will be of advantage to him in many ways."

" Most excellent daughter," he writes again, " you have merited no small reward for hindering bloodshed. We pray that God in His Mercy may repay you in goods both of body and of soul, both here and hereafter. We exhort you to foster, in your own way, whatever tends to promote good feeling between the two nations. Exert yourself on every opportunity as mercy may suggest."

Theodolind gave him other cause for congratulation. She exerted herself, " in her own way," to bring her family and her people into the one true fold. When her son, Adoald, was born at Genoa in 602, his father allowed him to be baptised a Catholic. St. Gregory's deathbed was gladdened by the tidings, and he sent " the royal Adoald " a relic of the True Cross, with affectionate wishes that he might " grow up glorious in the sight of God."

Adoald was crowned, probably in his father's lifetime, with the famous Iron Crown of

Lombardy, which he was the first of a long succession of princes to wear. In this golden circlet, sparkling with jewels, Theodolind had enshrined the thin strip of iron, forged from one of the sacred Nails of Calvary, which the Empress St. Helena had erstwhile fastened to the helmet of her son, Constantine the Great.

St. Gregory knew of Theodolind's devotion to holy relics. He sent her, at different times, filings from St. Peter's chains, dust from the tomb of St. Paul, and *brandea*, or cloths, which had touched the bodies of certain martyrs. He sent her, too, a copy of his *Dialogues*, that most popular of all his works, the writing whereof had served as relief and recreation amid the labours, anxieties and illnesses of his weary years as Pope.

"One day," it begins, "overweighted with the burden of worldly business, I sought a secluded spot where I might quietly indulge in grief. And there I ran over in my mind all that was unpleasant in my position. And when I had sat there a long time in sorrow and in silence, there came to me Peter, my dear son and deacon, a man whom I had loved from his youth upward, a man with whom I was wont to share my studies in Holy Scripture."

To him Gregory unbosomed his discontent, because of the "dust of worldly business"

which so defiled his soul as to render it unfit to muse upon things heavenly, and his dismay when he compared his own weakness and imperfection with the lives of those good men and true who were not, as he was, "storm-tost amid the boisterous billows of worldly affairs."

"If I should, Peter, but relate to you those facts concerning the lives and miracles of holy men in Italy, whom I have known myself, or heard of from the lips of trustworthy witnesses, I should sooner lack day to talk in, than matter to talk about."

Many of the "miracles" would not pass muster nowadays at the Lourdes Bureau, or in the strict inquiries which precede canonisation. But St. Gregory wrote, as Abbot Smith points out, "in an age of continued calamity; and during such periods people look for wonders, and even educated men are led to give credence to signs and portents."

The book is not meant to be an utterance *ex-cathedra*. The holy Pope wrote down his stories just as he heard them. He names his authorities in most cases, and warns his readers that the wording is his own, only because he found it impossible to translate verbatim from the spoken dialect into write-worthy Latin. "Some of my informants told their stories in very rustic style, so that a man of letters could

not decently preserve their actual words in his record."

This collection of pious anecdotes has been compared to the *Fioretti* or Little Flowers of St. Francis. Both books mirror faithfully the Italy in which they were written. But the bright and sunny *Fioretti* are of Catholic Italy in the thirteenth century, while the *Dialogues* deal with Italy, writhing under the heel of the Barbarians, amid the ruins of her former splendour. The *Fioretti*, moreover, never obtrude their moral, while St. Gregory used his stories to make the truths of religion and the virtues of a devout life more readily understood and relished by the average man.

"And above all they gave, or seemed to give, what the men of those times especially craved for, a proof of God's continual presence with His people, an assurance that even then, when evil seemed universally triumphant, the power of God was still put forth to punish and to save." (*Dudden.*)

Many of the tales reappear in the *Homilies*. But as the collection grew, the needs of the Lombards became evidently uppermost in St. Gregory's mind. For the fourth book deals entirely with the nature of the soul and its life after death, questions which sorely perplexed the Teutons of that period, and about which

their mythology was most vague. We have all heard Bede's account of the Northumbrian noble who compared the life of man here below to the swift flight of a sparrow on a dark, snowy night, in at one door and out at the other of a well-lit, well-warmed room.

" While he is within he is safe from the storm. But after a short space of fair weather, he vanishes out of our sight into the dark winter from which he came."

Although Bede does not mention it, St. Paulinus had doubtless with him a copy of the *Dialogues* from which to satisfy the honest heathen.

There were Arians as well as pagans among the Lombards, but these heretics seem to have given little trouble from a theological point of view. For Arianism was essentially a State religion ; and the conversion of the people followed that of the prince, as a matter of course. In Africa Arianism vanished with the Vandals, about the time our saint was born. In the year before his pontificate began the heresy died out in Spain with the conversion of King Reccared.

Leovigild, the last Arian ruler of the Visigoths, began his busy reign in 568, the year the Lombards invaded Italy. At this date the imperial troops still held Cordova, and the native Spaniards looked to Constantinople for

support when the arrogance of their Arian masters became intolerable. The Suabians in the North, too, were now Catholics. They had long ago fraternised with the Basques, and were on friendly terms with the Franks on the other side of the Pyrenees.

But the ruling race in Spain, the Visigoths, were bitter Arians, and St. Gregory of Tours tells us that their nobles had "the detestable habit of killing their king whenever he displeased them." But Leovigild cured them of this bad habit, for he left not a male alive among the nobles, and took steps to start a dynasty.

To keep the kingly office in his family he had his son, Hermengild, crowned, and gave him rule over Seville and the districts around. A series of raids broke the power of the Greek garrisons. Leovigild took from the Suabians their treasure and their land. Matrimonial alliances put him on a friendly footing with the Frankish kings. His own second wife, Galswinth, was by a previous marriage mother of Brunehaut, Queen of Austrasia, and of Galswinth, wife and victim of King Chilperic of Neustria. Brunehaut's daughter, Ingonde, became the bride of King Hermengild; and this child of thirteen resisted all attempts to undermine her faith, and bore bravely the harsh treatment meted out to her by her grandmother,

Queen Galswinth. Ingonde's constancy so impressed her bridegroom that he abjured Arianism, and received Confirmation at the hands of his uncle, St. Leander, Bishop of Seville.

Leovigild ordered his son to give up his faith or his crown. Civil war ensued; and St. Leander, driven from his see, went to Constantinople to appeal to the emperor for military support. Such was the state of Spain when St. Gregory heard the story from his lips.

Both saints were back at their duties in the West when Hermengild, in prison, had his head cloven with an axe by his father's orders, because he refused to receive his Easter Communion at the hands of an Arian bishop.

"One Visigoth died that many might live," is St. Gregory's comment. "One grain was sown in faith, and a great crop of faithful people sprang therefrom."

For in 589 Leovigild died, full of remorse; and Reccared, his second son, succeeded him on the throne. Of this young king, St. Gregory writes: "Walking in the footsteps of his brother the martyr, he utterly renounced Arianism, and laboured so earnestly to restore religion that he brought the whole nation of the Visigoths to the Faith of Christ, and would not suffer anyone that was a heretic among his subjects to bear arms and serve in his wars."

St. Gregory further expresses his joy in a letter to St. Leander:

"But since you know the wiles of the old enemy, and that he wages a fiercer war against those who have once been victorious, I trust that Your Holiness will now watch over the King, so that he may finish what he has well begun. Do not suffer him to take pride in his good works. Help him to preserve, by the excellency of his life, the faith which he has now embraced. Make it clear to him that he must prove himself by his works a citizen of the Heavenly Kingdom. And so, after many years, may he pass happily from crown to crown."

Some years later he writes to Reccared himself: "I cannot express in words, most excellent son, how pleased I am with your work and conduct. I often speak to my children here of your achievements, and we wonder at them with delight. And often are my feelings roused against myself, sluggish and useless and torpid in listless ease, while kings are toiling to gather in souls for the heavenly Kingdom. Still I have this comfort, good man, that when I rejoice and exult in your good deeds, what is yours by labour becomes mine by charity."

With this letter he sends a relic of the True Cross to Reccared, and a small key which had touched the relics of St. Peter. "In this key

I have inserted some filings from his chains, so that what bound his neck in martyrdom may deliver you from your sins." He exhorts him to persevere in humility of heart and cleanness of body, and bids him not to do quickly even that which is lawful, "lest power corrupt the mind and anger creep in. For deeds of cruelty will be condoned as just, if anger once get a footing in the mind, not following behind reason, as a handmaid ready at reason's call to step forward and chastise a criminal."

Reccared begged St. Gregory to obtain from the emperor a copy of a treaty with Justinian which defined the position of the Gothic kings. The Pope discreetly declined to interfere. "You ought to search your own archives," he hints, "for the documents which are unfavourable to you, and not ask me to produce them."

He advised the young king to treat all his subjects on an equal footing, so that merit and not race should decide a man's fitness for office, as was the custom when Spain was under Roman rule. Well had it been for his dynasty had Reccared followed this advice. But the Visigoths alone had full citizenship, and when the Moors won at Xeres in 711, the Spaniards acquiesced with apathy in the change of masters. And so in a land admirably fitted for guerilla warfare, the Mohammedans conquered with such

ease and rapidity that in 732 they crossed the Pyrenees to receive their first set-back at Poitiers, when they hurled themselves against a nation in arms with all the fighting qualities to be expected from an army of Gauls and Franks.

Evils of another nature afflicted Gaul. There victors and vanquished had the same religion, the same civic rights. Since the conversion of Clovis the clergy held an honoured place in feudalism ; but simony and lay investiture, with their hideous outcome of immorality and independence of the Holy See, sapped the energy of the Churches among the Franks. Black indeed is the record of unworthy ecclesiastics which confront us in the pages of such writers as St. Gregory of Tours.

In his letters to King Childebert of Austrasia and to his own apostolic delegate, Virgilius, Bishop of Arles, our holy Pope denounces these abuses in strong terms. " Reports have reached me," he writes, " that in parts of Gaul and Germany no one receives Holy Orders without paying money. If this be so, I condemn it with grief ; for, when the priesthood is corrupt within, it cannot resist assaults from without. I am informed, too, of another detestable practice. When bishops die, mere laymen are sometimes tonsured, from desire of temporal glory. They suddenly become priests, and at

one step mount to the rank of bishops. And thus one who has never been a pupil himself becomes a master. How can he teach what he has not learnt? How can he atone for the sins of others when he has not bewailed his own? He may be called a shepherd, but he does not feed his flock, he leads it astray." In the royal armies, he reminds the king, only tried men are made generals. "It is shameful, and we blush to say it, priests assume command of souls who have not seen even the beginnings of religious warfare."

Politically all was chaos. When Childebert died in 596 his kingdom was divided between his infant sons, Theodebert in Burgundy and Theodoric in Austrasia, under the regency of their grandmother Brunehaut. Neustria, the land North of the Loire and West of the Meuse, was ruled by the brilliantly clever and atrociously vile Queen Fredegonde, in the name of her son, Clotaire.

With Fredegonde, St. Gregory had little or nothing to do. He did not even write to secure her goodwill for the travellers, when he sent St. Augustine and his forty monks to Kent. But many letters passed between the Pope and Brunehaut.

At her request he sent the pallium to Syagrius, Bishop of Autun. The case is unique in this

pontificate, for the pallium gave indeed prestige to Syagrius, and thereby increased his usefulness to the Church, but did not burden him with extra responsibilities.

Brunehaut loved Autun, and we find St. Gregory issuing charters to the convent, the church and the hospital which she founded in that city. "We rejoice in your Christianity," he told her in a covering letter, "since you strive to increase the honour of those whom you know to be servants of God."

"How many good gifts has God bestowed upon you," he writes on another occasion. And how clearly do your many meritorious deeds make manifest to men that the goodness of heavenly grace has filled your heart, and that you add to regal power the ornament of wisdom. I have, therefore, great confidence that you will correct abuses. Do God's work, and He will do yours. Order a synod to meet in order to put down simony in your kingdom. Believe me, money sinfully acquired is never profitably spent. Years of experience have taught me this. If you do not wish to be deprived of anything unjustly, see to it that you acquire nothing unjustly. If you wish to conquer your enemies by the help of God, observe with reverential awe the Commandments of God."

CHAPTER X

MISSIONARY MONKS.

BRUNEHAUT'S niece by marriage, Bertha, the daughter of Caribert, King of Paris, had a heathen husband, Ethelbert, King of Kent, whose political supremacy stretched beyond his own boundaries as far as the Humber, the Severn and the Tamar. Luidhard, a French bishop, went with Bertha as her chaplain, and said Mass for her in the ruined chapel of St. Martin, hard by the walls of Canterbury. But neither bishop nor queen made any impression on the religion of the country or the king.

Years had not weakened the high resolve formed long ago in the slave-market at Rome. In the autumn of 595 St. Gregory ordered Candidus, the priest in charge of the papal estates in Provence, to spend the revenues on clothes for the poor, and on English slave boys, seventeen or eighteen years of age, whom he must send for their education to monasteries in Rome. A priest was to go with them to begin their instruction, and to baptize in case of death on the way.

In the following spring a band of monks left Rome to preach the Gospel in Kent. At their head was Augustine, who had once shared Gregory's cell in St. Andrew's, and became later his confidential secretary. At Marseilles and at Aix they were hospitably entertained, and frightened, too, with gruesome tales of the savagery of the Angles for whose sake they had set forth. The difficulty of making themselves understood by Frenchmen who spoke no Latin, brought home to them, moreover, the fact that they would have to live among barbarians of whose language they knew not a word.

In short, they were so disheartened that St. Augustine had to leave them in the monastic islets of Lérins, and hasten back to Rome to plead for their recall. But the Pope sent him again forward with a letter of encouragement dated July the 23rd

" Gregory, servant of the servants of God, to his brethren the servants of Our Lord Jesus Christ, on their way to England.

" Better not to begin a good work than to leave off after having once begun. My beloved sons, you have begun this work with the help of God. You must strive strenuously to complete it. Be not deterred by the toils of the journey nor by the tongues of detractors. Onward in God's Name ! The more you have

to suffer the brighter will be your glory eternally. Obey in all things, with humble reverence, Augustine, your prior, whom we now appoint your abbot. Whatever he tells you to do will be of profit to your souls. May the grace of the Almighty guard and guide you! May he grant me to behold from the heavenly shore the fruit of your exertions. If I cannot share your toil as your fellow-worker, I can at least rejoice in your harvest. For God knows I lack not the goodwill to work."

Augustine brought with him other letters which the Pope had written to such influential persons as could help the missionaries on their journey. He begged Brunehaut, "accustomed to good works," to furnish safe conduct. He begged her grandsons to supply them with interpreters. He wrote to the King of Neustria on their behalf, and to all bishops through whose dioceses their road lay.

Only in Anjou did they meet with incivility. Here they had to shelter for the night under the spreading branches of an elm tree. Here the people shrank from them as from were-wolves, and the women cursed them and yelled revilingly.

The French interpreters had swelled the band to forty when they landed at Ebbesfleet, on the low flat beach in treeless Thanet. Here they

halted and sent messengers to King Ethelbert, to tell how they had come to him from Rome with the best tidings, even the assurance, to all who would accept it, of eternal joys in heaven with the living and only God.

A few days later the king gave them audience in the open air, for he feared bewitchment if he received the missionaries indoors. But they advanced, says Bede, " with divine not magic might, bearing aloft a great silver Cross and the picture of Our Saviour painted on a gilded board, and entreating in chanted litany that Our Lord would save both themselves and those to whom they came."

Then Augustine stood forth—a man of reverend and gentle mien, of patrician bearing, a head and shoulders above his fellows. At the king's command he sat and told through his interpreters " how the pitiful Jesus by His Own Agony had redeemed the sinful world and opened the Kingdom of Heaven to all true believers."

" Fair words and promises are these," quoth Ethelbert, " but new to us and of uncertain import. I cannot all at once forsake that which I and all Englishmen have from infancy held sacred. But since you have come to us from afar to make known to us what you believe to be best and true, we shall do you no hurt, but

treat you kindly and supply your needs. Neither do we forbid you to preach and to bring over as many as you can to your religion."

So the black-robed procession passed on to Canterbury, where the king allotted them their lodgings. As they entered the city gates, they raised the Cross on high, and chanted :

" We beseech Thee, O Lord, in all Thy Mercy ! Turn away Thy wrath from this city and from Thy holy house ! For we have sinned. Alleluia ! "

The monks lived in Canterbury after the fashion of the early Christians, says Bede, " in prayer, in vigils and in fasting, preaching the Word of Life to as many as came to listen, refusing all gifts save the bare necessaries of life, ready to die, if need were, for the truths they taught. And many believed and were baptized, won over by the simplicity of their innocent life and by the sweetness of their heavenly doctrine."

Soon the king himself became a Christian. He compelled none to embrace the faith, only he showed more affection to the believers, as his fellow-citizens in the Kingdom of God.

" For he had learnt from his instructors and leaders to salvation that the service of Christ ought to be voluntary and not constrained."

King Ethelbert was baptized on Whitsun Eve

in St. Martin's Church. On the following Christmas Eve ten thousand of his subjects were born again to Christ in the waters of the Swale, near the mouth of the Medway. Between these dates St. Augustine had crossed over to France, and come back consecrated " Archbishop of the English."

The title may have been premature, since all the converts thus far were Jutes and Saxons. But in a sense it was prophetic. Christianity was to prove more powerful than race in welding together the isolated kingdoms of the Heptarchy.

Ethelbert with his Great Lords signed and sealed a charter granting land to St. Augustine and his monks at Canterbury.

" I swear and ordain, in the Name of Almighty God, the Just and Sovereign Judge, that the land thus given is given for ever, that it shall not be lawful for me or my successors to take any part thereof from its owners. If any one attempt to lessen or annul our gift, let him be in this life deprived of the Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ, and in the Day of Judgment cut off from the company of the Saints."

But before the foundations could be dug at Canterbury, St. Augustine sent two of his companions to Rome with such glad tidings

that St. Gregory could write in a letter to the patriarch of Alexandria :

" Your messenger found me sick and leaves me sick. But God grants to me gladness of heart to temper the bitterness of my bodily pain. . . . I know you will rejoice in my joy, and that you have helped me by your prayers. The people of the Angles, in their remote angle of the earth, have until now been worshippers of stocks and stones. Moved by your prayers, God inspired me to send a monk of my monastery to preach the Gospel there. News has just reached me of his well-being, and of such marvellous doings that he and his companions seem endowed with the power of the Apostles. More than ten thousand Englishmen received Holy Baptism on the Feast of Our Lord's Nativity. . . . Your prayers are fruitful in places where you are not, while your works are manifest in the place where you are."

The missionaries had built their monastery before the envoys returned, and with them Paulinus and Meletus.

" They brought with them," says Bede, " the pallium for Augustine, and a goodly store of altar vessels and priestly vestments, relics of the holy apostles and martyrs, and many books." They brought gifts also and letters for the king and queen.

To Bertha, St. Gregory administered a mild rebuke: "Long ago you should have striven, with the prudence of a true Christian, to turn the heart of your husband to the faith which you profess. Well-instructed and pious as you are, this duty should have been neither tedious nor difficult. With the help of Divine grace, you must now study to recover with increase what has been lost through neglect. I pray that your love and devotion may make the angels in heaven share my joy in your Christian life."

He wrote to Ethelbert: "Almighty God puts good men in power, that through them He may bestow the gifts of His Mercy. Guard with all care, my glorious son, the grace you have received from on High. . . . Build up a nation in holy purity, exhorting, threatening, encouraging, chastising, and giving good example yourself. . . . You have with you our very reverend brother, Bishop Augustine. If you give ear to what he tells you, Almighty God will be moved to hearken to him when he prays for you."

A special courier overtook the envoys on their road with a letter of useful advice. The heathen temples, if well built, should be used for Christian worship. "Once the idols are thrust out, purify the temples with Holy Water

and erect altars enclosing relics. For the people will come more readily to the old familiar spots, and putting error from their hearts, adore therein the living God."

The festivals of Holy Church are to take the place of the beer-feasts in honour of the heathen gods. "Let them no longer slaughter oxen to the devil, but kill them, to the glory of God, for their own eating, with thanksgiving to the Giver of all good things. Thus while we leave them some enjoyment to the senses, they may more easily be led to desire the joys of the soul. It is impossible to change in an instant all the habits of these uncultured minds. A mountain is not climbed by leaps and bounds, but steadily step by step."

These were some of the suggestions which St. Meletus was to convey to St. Augustine by word of mouth, "that he, being on the spot, may consider how he is to order all things." Augustine the monk had hitherto had his superior and his rule to regulate his actions. Augustine the bishop—a bishop, moreover, in a heathen land—could not always find it fitting to conform in every detail to Roman practice. He had submitted to the Pope ten questions on points of discipline: St. Gregory dealt with each fully, but remarked:

"I suppose you have been asked these

questions, and wish for my judgment to confirm your own. But Your Fraternity ought to be able to decide such things yourself. . . .

"You are familiar, my brother, with the customs of the Roman Church in which you were bred. But it pleases me that you should choose from the different Churches in Gaul as well, the things that seem to you devout and according to reason for use in England."

In St. Gregory's mind there were eventually to be two archbishops in England, one at London and one at York, each with twelve suffragans. Augustine is to hold the primacy as long as he lives; afterwards it is to pass from Canterbury to whichever archbishop happens to be senior in date of consecration. As yet he is the only bishop in England. He may, if he chooses, invite other bishops from Gaul as witnesses when he consecrates a bishop.

"Married people are invited to weddings, to share in the joy of bride and bridegroom and to wish them well. In like manner, it behoveth that when a man is closely united to God in the sacred ministry, there should be present those who can rejoice in his advancement, and jointly pour forth their prayers for his safe keeping."

He is to confer with the Bishop of Arles if he sees in the Bishops of Gaul anything amiss

that may be mended. "But we give you no authority over the bishops in Gaul," St. Gregory is careful to add. "Only by persevering kindness and the display of good works for their imitation may you labour for their reform. For it is written, 'Thou shalt not move a sickle into another man's harvest.' All the bishops of Britain, however, we commit to Your Fraternity, so that you may instruct the unlearned, strengthen the weak, punish with authority the perverse."

In accordance with the Pope's command, the bishop of the English met in conference the bishops and teachers of the Southern British Churches, at a place near Malmesbury, called in Bede's time "Augustine's Oak." He urged them, for Christ's dear sake, to work with him in Catholic harmony at the conversion of the heathen, and "compelled by real necessity, he bowed his knees to the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and prayed that a blind Englishman there present might receive his bodily sight."

The cure that followed on the instant convinced the Britons that Augustine was indeed a man of God. But they would enter into no engagements without the consent of their people. So the date was fixed for another and more formal conference, to discuss the differences between the Roman and the Celtic uses.

Seven bishops and many learned monks from Bangor were chosen delegates by the Britons. "A holy and discreet hermit" advised them to exercise their private judgment (or his!) with regard to Augustine's fitness to be their father in God.

"If at your approach he shall rise, hearken to him submissively, assured he is the servant of Christ. But if he shall dispise you and remain seated, let him also be despised by you."

The Britons saw fit to arrive late, and St. Augustine, the Pope's representative, saw fit to receive them sitting. "Forthwith they flew into a rage, charged him with pride, and endeavoured to contradict every word he said." In vain did Augustine offer to yield to them many of the points in dispute:

"If ye will keep Easter at the Pope's time, and administer baptism according to the Roman rite, and jointly with us preach the Word of God to the English nation, we will readily tolerate all the other things you do, though contrary to the custom of the Universal Church."

But they would have none of him as archbishop, and murmured among themselves: "Since he did not rise to greet us even now, he will dispise us as of no worth if we begin to be under him."

And Augustine broke up the conference with

the dark forboding: "If ye will not accept peace from brethren, ye shall have to accept war from enemies. If ye will not preach the way of life to the English, ye shall have to undergo the vengeance of death at the hands of Englishmen."

And so it befell. For Ethelfrith, King of the Northumbrians, defeated the Welsh with great slaughter at the place called Carlégion, or the City of Legions. Twelve hundred and fifty of the monks from Bangor stood on the battle-field, with one Brocmail appointed to defend them, while they prayed against the swords of the barbarians. And King Ethelfrith cried out:

"These men indeed bear no weapons, yet they cry out to their God against us, and oppose us by their prayers."

He ordered his men to fall upon them, and twelve hundred of the monks were slain. The other fifty saved their lives by flight.

Augustine was a saint in heaven, says Bede, before his prophecy was thus fulfilled. Nor did St. Gregory live long enough to express himself on the failure of the conference. The points at issue were, after all, of minor importance. The divergence in the date of Easter was an error in arithmetic not in dogma. The tonsure varied even on the continent. For the Greeks shaved the whole head, the Romans left a round fringe

of hair. In Gaul long locks were left at the back unshorn, for among the Franks short hair marked out the thrall.

As regards baptismal rites, St. Gregory himself judged it expedient that the Spanish Churches should differ from the use of Rome, "so long as there is nothing at variance with the faith." At Rome the waters of regeneration were poured three times. But St. Leander lived in the midst of Arians, and so the Pope wrote to him:

"Since nowadays the heretics immerse the infant three times I think it ought not to be done by you, lest in numbering the immersions they divide the Divinity, and if we adopt their practice they boast that they have changed our methods."

St. Augustine may have insisted overmuch on these points of discipline. But as to receiving the Britons seated, he deserves no blame—unless, and only unless, he omitted to state clearly in the preliminaries the authority he held from the Pope.

The old British Church in Wales has been described as "an aggregate of clans centring in a few great monasteries," and Irish monks had leavened it with their own deep reverence for Rome. The great abbey of Bangor, with its "seven times three hundred monks," was

itself an Irish foundation, and most of the Welsh bishops were trained at Bangor. We have no grounds for assuming that the sons of St. Comgall at Bangor were less loyal to the Holy See than the sons of St. Columcille at Iona, or than St. Columban and his spiritual family at Luxeuil, that Irish colony in the Vosges which, at that very time, was gladdening the Pope by their labours to spread the faith in the Black Forest and in the Rhineland.

St. Columban's letters to St. Gregory and his successors are not always respectful in tone. "Pardon me," he writes to Pope Boniface, "if my words sound offensive in pious ears. The native liberty of my race has made me overbold." But always in these letters Rome is "the chief seat of the orthodox faith," and in Rome "the pillar of the Church stands firm." The Pope is the Shepherd of Shepherds, the General-in-Chief of God's Army.

"To the Chair of St. Peter," he writes, "we Irish are especially bound. For however great and glorious Rome may be esteemed elsewhere, it is that Chair alone which makes her great and glorious among us. Over other nations the prodigious fame of ancient Rome has spread as something supremely august; but the Irish have only heard of it since the chariot of Christ came rolling to us across the sea, drawn by

those two swift coursers St. Peter and St. Paul. . . . There has never been a heretic, a Jew or a schismatic among us. We preserve unchanged the Catholic Faith, as it was first delivered to us by the Pope, the successor of the Holy Apostles."

St. Columcille died in Iona just one week after King Ethelbert was baptized in Kent. His thirty faithful years in Scotland cannot have escaped the notice of St. Gregory. How otherwise account for the fine passage in his *Moralia* from the Book of Job, a book which he does not seem to have retouched since he sent a copy to St. Leander in 595.

" Lo that Britain, whose tongue has uttered savage sounds but now echoes the Alleluia of the Hebrews ! Lo that wild sea, lying calm and submissive at the feet of the saints ! Those turbulent tribes that the princes of earth could not quell by the sword, see how the simple word of the priests has curbed their pride. See that unbeliever who never dreaded troops of fighting men. Now that he believes, he is obedient to the voice of the meek. He knows fear now, but it is the fear of sin. Preaching and miracles have strengthened him in the grace of God, and he yearns with his whole heart to come to glory everlasting."

It was because he knew what rich harvest

crowned the zeal of Columcille in the North that Gregory built high hopes on the missionary adaptability of the Celts in South Britain. The two saints never met in the flesh. Legends, however, have been invented to bring them face to face by bilocation, and there was long treasured at Iona the brooch which it was fondly fancied the Pope gave the abbot in exchange for his pen.

Better authenticated is the anecdote of the Irish pilgrims who visited Rome and returned to their own country. Then, as now, Irishmen were careful as to cleanliness in body and in soul whenever they approached the Holy Table. But, as we have said in the first chapter, the Roman aqueducts were out of repair, and it was inconvenient to supply the pilgrims with all the water they desired. So their Roman hosts informed them it was sinful to take baths on Sunday. The pilgrims believed them in good faith. One of the number, St. Conal, on his return to Ireland induced the monks of his monastery to forego all washing and shaving on days when the Church forbade servile work.

St. Gregory was wroth with the Romans when the story reached his ears. "If men desire to bathe for the luxury and pleasure of it," he wrote in 594, "we do not permit it even on week-days. But if they desire it for the sake

of health and cleanliness, we do not forbid it even on Sundays. For if it be a sin to take baths on a Sunday, the face even ought not to be washed on that day. Why deny to the whole body what is allowed without scruple to its parts ? "

CHAPTER XI.

AN ABSENTEE LANDLORD

THERE are epochs in the world's history when a system gets its doom. Our Saviour's Holy Week discourse on Mount Olivet seems a warrant to his Disciples to look upon such crises as a rehearsal of the great and terrible Day of the Lord, His Second Coming to judge mankind—a rehearsal merely, for He tells us in plain words :

" Ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars ; *but the end is not yet.* . . . Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there shall be pestilences and famines, and earthquakes in places. Now all these are the *beginning* of sorrows."

It was the end of the Jews as God's chosen people, in the Apostolic Age when Jerusalem fell. It was the end of the Roman system in St. Gregory's lifetime, when the barbarian wave broke over the West and imperial unity made way for feudalism. Many passages in his letters and in his homilies make it clear that he expected—as St. Paul expected in his day, and as so many saints before and since expected in

theirs—to see the end of the drama of human history.

"We would have Your Glory know," he writes to King Ethelbert, "from the words of Almighty God in Holy Scripture, that the end of the present world is at hand. . . . We see many things around us which were not before: changes in the air and terrors from the sky, and tempests outside the order of the seasons, wars, famine, plagues and earthquakes in divers places. Should any of these things happen in your country, let not your mind be disturbed; for these signs of the end of the world are sent beforehand, in order that we may be solicitous for our souls, on the alert for the hour of death, and ready with good works to meet our Judge."

The great danger of such an attitude of expectancy is the listless apathy it is wont to engender. St. Paul blames the Thessalonians for the idleness in which they awaited the Last Day. For the Disciples in that wealthy business centre neglected their work to such an extent that he had to seek alms for them at Philippi, to weave tents for a livelihood while he was with them, and to write to them afterwards in grave rebuke. "He that will not work, neither shall he eat."

The self-same Charity of Christ that stirred in St. Paul, and made of the apostle again an

artisan, moved St. Gregory, the wealthiest landowner in Italy, to enter minutely into questions of tenant and farmer, rent and taxes, and everything else connected with the improvement of the estates under his control.

The continuous wars had upset agriculture and altered the tenure of land. Thraldom under the Lombards was a condition less hard than citizenship under the grinding extortions of the imperial procurators. Many of the landowners, unwilling to see their peasantry oppressed, made over their estates to the Church and went to seek a livelihood at the Court of Constantinople.

Thus in Sicily we read of "the Patrimony of St. Ambrose" belonging to the see of Milan, as well as "the Patrimony of St. Peter" belonging to the Holy See. "In our times," wrote St. Gregory to the bishops of that island, "we must not be entirely engrossed with the salvation of souls. We must also be mindful of the defence and temporal interests of those committed to our care."

Other Popes may have been content to draw a goodly revenue each year from their house rents in Rome, from their olive-groves in the Campagna, from their cornfields in Sicily, from the timber in the Calabrian forests, from the lead mines in the islands on the western seaboard. They may have left more or less

completely to their agents (*defensors*) the management of these and the other patrimonies of St. Peter in Tuscany, in Gaul, in Africa, and " the tiny one in Dalmatia."

But Gregory looked into things himself. After he became Pope he never seems to have travelled far from Rome, yet he made sure that every acre was made to yield its full amount of produce.

" We have studs of horses that are quite useless," he wrote on one occasion. " They do not bring us in sixty pence for every sixty shillings that we pay the grooms. Sell all the horses, except four hundred of the younger ones, and these you are to distribute among four hundred of our farmers, so that each may bring us in something every year. And set the grooms to till the land."

His letters also to the prefect Innocent and the exarch Gennadius, show that he utilised the goodwill of these officials to bring under cultivation the barren tracts of church land in the neighbourhood of Carthage. Convict labour was a glut in the market, whenever the tribesmen of the oases clashed swords with the imperial legions, and a steady stream of prisoners of war could always be reckoned on to drain and dig, and earn privileges by good behaviour, until at last they became Christians

and settled down as law-abiding, taxpaying citizens.

But it was only in Africa that the Pope could praise the zeal of the government officials "helping him to feed the flock of the Blessed Apostle Peter." Elsewhere he refused point-blank ever to lease a portion of his patrimony to men who had experience in grinding the faces of the poor, either as tax-collectors or recruiting serjeants. For the farmers, or *conductores* as they were called, made what profit they could off the land, after paying the stipulated rent in money or in produce; and as they were usually responsible also for the taxes in their district, they had ample opportunity for showing themselves grasping and oppressive to the tillers of the soil. There are many allusions to *conductores* in St. Gregory's letters, and it behoved his land agents to keep a strict watch on their proceedings.

Sometimes the farmers forced the peasants to lend them money which was never repaid. And there were many vexatious petty payments exacted over and above the rent.

"Make out new leases," the Pope gave orders. "Increase the rent, if need be, and if the peasants can afford it. But the lease is to include everything; let there be no more of these disgraceful additions. And lest, after my death, the burdens which are now abolished

should be again reimposed, we wish you to set down very clearly in every lease the exact sum the tenant has to pay."

His agents always profited when a farm changed hands. The farmers themselves were sometimes eager to leave a place when they owed money to poor people who could not afford to sue them for a debt at a distance. St. Gregory, on the other hand, liked to keep the same farmers on the same land as long as possible. He was in favour of long leases, and usually granted them for a term of three specified lives.

"We learn that when farmers die their relatives are not allowed to inherit, and the land reverts to the Church. We hereby decree that the next-of-kin shall succeed as heir, and that the property of the deceased man is to remain intact. Should very young children inherit, discreet persons shall manage the estate until they are of age to look after their own affairs."

He granted farming leases grudgingly, and only under severe restrictions. He always preferred that the peasants and slaves should work the Church lands directly for the benefit of the Church. Occasionally, if the business entailed was not too engrossing, the management of a patrimony was entrusted to the local bishop. More usually a special *rector* was

appointed with or without *defensors* working under him. Sometimes a defensor had entire charge of an isolated estate, and reported directly to the Holy See.

St. Gregory's rectors and defensors were priests or at least clerks in holy orders, well tried and proved trustworthy. "Peter the Sub-deacon," rector of the Sicilian patrimony, is said to have been the Peter of the *Dialogues*, his own "bosom friend from early youth." On their appointment these officials had to swear before the Tomb of St. Peter that they would promote the interests of the Church as "the treasury of the labourers and of the poor."

"You must carry out justly and vigorously whatever commands you receive from us for the welfare of the poor," writes the Pope to the defensor Vitus. "Do faithfully whatever work we may give you to do. Know that you will have to give an account of all your actions at the Judgment Seat of God."

In a circular introducing a new defensor to his district, St. Gregory writes: "We order you to obey without hesitation whatever he shall command for the benefit of the Church. He has full power to punish severely the disobedient and the contumacious. We have ordered him to enforce ecclesiastical law, whenever slaves abscond or boundary marks are

removed. He has been ordered not to seize anything by force under any pretext."

It sometimes happened, even on Church lands, that unfaithful agents took advantage of their position to get unduly rich. " I have learned," he wrote to the Bishop of Cagliari, " that certain laymen, charged with the administration of your patrimony, have acted to the detriment of your peasants and refuse to render an account. It behoves you to examine into this with the utmost diligence, to decide according to the justice of the case, and to make these men, if guilty, disgorge their prey."

He was not less rigorous when his own agents were in fault. " It has come to our knowledge," he wrote to Peter the Sub-deacon, " that for the past ten years—from the time of Antonius the defensor until now—many persons complain of unjust treatment. Their lands have been forcibly occupied, their goods seized, their slaves enticed away, all this without pretence of legal warrant. Inquire diligently into all these things, and if you find aught unjustly detained by the Church, restore it at once to the proper owner, lest he be compelled to come to me. The long journey would inconvenience him greatly, and it is impossible for me to decide whether or not he speaks truth."

And again : " When Your Experience employs

your tenants for any work they are not bound to perform, we wish them to be well paid for their services, lest the purse of the Church be defiled by ill-gotten gains. When we order you to purchase for our store-houses in Rome, we mean you to buy from strangers, not to take more than is customary from the tenants of the Church."

When the rent was paid in corn, a trifle extra might be exacted to feed the sailors on the journey. But the peasants were not expected to make good any damage due to accident. And those who preferred to pay in money were to have their rent assessed at the current price of corn for the year, so that all alike might benefit, when the harvest was good and bread was cheap.

In Sicily he found that the farmers claimed one bushel out of twenty, instead of one out of twenty-five. False measures, too, were used so that the peasants paid twenty-five bushels instead of sixteen.

"We are glad you have broken the fraudulent measure," he writes to Peter. "But how about the injustice in the past? Have we not reason to fear lest the farmers' ill-gotten gains be attributed to us as sinful negligence. We wish Your Experience to make a list of the very poor peasants on each estate, and to distribute

to each, according to his degree of poverty, the cows, the sheep and the swine which you will buy with the money wrongfully acquired."

Farms held unjustly must be restored at once to the lawful owners. "Attend to this, for I am never weary reminding you of it, and if you neglect it, you shall have my voice against you at the Judgment Seat of God. On the other hand, should you see some property which you think belongs to the Church, be careful not to vindicate our claim by violence. Otherwise our unrighteous action in a righteous cause will make our just claim seem unjust in the eyes of Almighty God."

In the same chatty letter Peter is instructed to give one hundred gold pieces to Eusebius the abbot, and six to Anastasia, a nun at Palermo. Sisinnius, who was once a judge and is now in great want, is to have twenty vessels of wine and four shillings every year. Redemptor's wife has bequeathed a silver salver to a monastery, and ordered a silver shell to be sold for the benefit of her freedmen.

"See that her wishes be carried out, lest a mere trifle make us liable for great sins. The money due to us from the will of Antoninus should long ago have been paid, as we ordered, to monasteries and elsewhere. I know not why Your Negligence has delayed so long."

Again and again he warns his business men not to press the letter of the law, when it is a case of merciful assistance to the orphaned and the very poor.

" If with compassion and kindness we help our neighbour in his distress, undoubtedly we shall find Our Lord merciful to us when we pray."

" In questions admitting of doubt it is better to incline to mercy rather than to justice; especially when, by the surrender of a small thing, the Church will not greatly suffer, and on the other hand the poor and the orphan will be greatly relieved."

" Take care lest Almighty God condemn our just claims if unjustly pursued. You will be a faithful steward of the Apostle, Blessed Peter, if you act uprightly in the management of his estates, even though his temporal gains are lessened thereby."

Appeals from the poor always received his careful attention. One, Adeodatus, went in person to the Pope, petitioning to have remitted one of the two shillings he had to pay every year for a building he had put up on land " belonging to the Church." St. Gregory sent him home with a letter to his agent :

" Your Experience will look into this, and if his story be found correct see that he obtains

what he asks. His age and his poverty entitle him to this abatement."

Another time it was one, Alexander, who lodged a complaint against "our beloved son, Cyprian the deacon." He had not received proper wages, he said, during the three years when he worked at the building of a church in Catania. "We order you diligently to inquire into the matter. See that the just amount be paid to him, and put it down in your accounts."

Again it was Cosmas, a Syrian, who convinced the Pope "by witnesses and by his own tears," that he owed a hundred and fifty shillings, and had reason to hope his creditors would be satisfied with eighty. Though he considered eighty *solidi* too much to expect from a man who had nothing, St. Gregory sent his agent sixty, and a order to make terms with the creditors. "They ought to be satisfied with less," he argued, "if they are skilfully spoken with; for they have seized the man's child, and the law gives them no right to do that. Take special care, when they receive the money, that they give a full discharge in writing. Whatever may be over out of the sixty shillings give to Cosmas for the support of himself and his son. Afterwards strive to make him work off the debt by labour."

Peter, when summoned to Rome with his

account books, is instructed to leave a competent person in Sicily, whom he must admonish to deal gently with the peasants.

"Send your customary gifts to the praetors by his hand, so that you may win their favour for him. If the recruiting officers come round while you are away, he is to secure their goodwill by a small present."

The *burdatio*, the emperor's tax on land, was collected three times a year, in January, May and September. The first of these payments grievously inconvenienced the peasants, because it was made before they were able to sell their produce. They were compelled to borrow, and the public money-lenders charged heavy interest, sometimes as much as twenty-five per cent. And so Gregory orders Peter to advance the money to the peasants, a little at a time as they require it, so that they may not afterwards be forced to sell their crops at a ruinously low price. But he makes it clear that such loans are solely to benefit the borrower. Interest, however nominal, is not to be charged.

It seems impossible to exaggerate the cruelty of officials at this date when "the Roman Republic was at the last gasp, strangled by taxation like a traveller in the grip of brigands." Appeal to the emperor was useless. Avarice was Maurice's besetting sin, and he cared little

how his treasury was filled so long as it was full. The weight of taxation pressed heavier on Italy as more and more of the land was wrested from the empire, and thus the area dwindled over which the tax-gatherers remorselessly wrung their dues. So disgusted were the peasants with a life of toil, the fruits whereof they might never hope to enjoy, that they fled to the woods, to be hunted there like wild beasts, or they surrendered to the Lombards. Thraldom as captives of war was a fate preferable to citizenship, where free men were put to torture and their children sold as slaves.

A landowner in those days had great powers over his tenantry. His permission was required when a peasant wished to remove from his estate, or to marry outside it, or to give away or mortgage his movables, for these were looked upon as a security for the rent. The punishment of defaulters was also at his discretion. He might scourge or levy fines as he chose.

St. Gregory, however, had no intention of making the innocent suffer with the guilty. When a peasant on his estates was in fault, he wished him to be punished in person rather than in goods, unless of his own free will the culprit chose to placate with a small sum of money the officer charged to chastise him. The marriage fees might never exceed a shilling

—the very poor ought not to pay even that, he decreed—and these fees were not to be entered in the Pope's accounts at all. They were to go to the farmers whose interest it was to see that labourers immediately under them were happily circumstanced.

Given a conscientious master the slaves had an easier life than the *coloni* or free-born peasants. Sick or well, slaves were sure of their daily food, their lodging and their raiment. They had neither rent nor taxes to make them anxious. They could not be conscripted as soldiers. And now that Christianity had leavened Roman civilisation and softened its brutality, public opinion was against the master who acted harshly towards his slaves.

In the Roman law, even in the Christianized code as revised by Justinian, slaves had no civic rights. Unlike the *coloni* they could not appeal before the magistrates against oppression. But in every district there was at least one Church always open, where runaway slaves and fugitives from man's injustice might bide in safety, until the bishop could grant them a fair hearing.

St. Gregory was scrupulously particular that this privilege of sanctuary should never be abused. He had sometimes to point out in his letters that it was not intended to shield the

guilty, but only to guarantee just treatment, and that the ecclesiastical courts must not inconvenience the masters and the magistrates by undue delays.

Sometimes these fugitives claimed to belong to the Church, and there were rectors who admitted the claim before it could be legally proved.

"This displeases me much," wrote St. Gregory, "because it is unjust. If there be any slaves working for the patrimony under these doubtful conditions, see that they be restored at once. Afterwards if Holy Church can establish her claim, they may be taken from their masters by a regular action at law."

A slave had family rights. We find St. Gregory ordering the Bishop of Syracuse to punish a man who sold a bondwoman without her husband's consent. "Moreover, reprove sharply the Bishop of Messina for his neglect to punish the officials who were guilty of such disgraceful deeds. Tell him that if another story like this comes to me concerning any of his dependents, I will take action, not against the man in fault but against himself."

By a decree of Justinian, no master might stand in the way if a slave wished to enter religion, even though his purchase-money were not forthcoming. St. Gregory learned that one of his defensors in the Campagna owned a

slave-girl who sought "with tears and vehemence" to become a nun.

"Go to Felix the defensor," he wrote to Felix's rector, "demand of him the soul of this girl. Pay him the price he asks and send her here, under the charge of competent persons who will place her in a convent. Do it quickly, lest delay endanger this soul."

Slaves were only too willing to enter religion. "Our holy army fills up its gaps with bondmen who come to seek freedom in Christ," wrote St. Isidore of Seville, younger brother of St. Leander. "And it would be a serious fault not to admit them, since God has made no difference between the soul of a slave and the soul of a prince."

Of such religious recruits St. Augustine of Hippo had written two centuries before: "They have passed an apprenticeship rude enough to make them apt in their new condition. But it is not right that they should live in idleness when senators are glad to labour, nor that they should prove fastidious when the lords of vast possessions come to sacrifice their wealth."

To secure purity in motive St. Gregory decreed, in the synod of 595, that a slave-postulant, who stood the test of a long and severe probation, was to be emancipated before profession, "so that as a free man he might

exchange servitude under an earthly master for a still more strenuous servitude in the family of Jesus Christ." He speaks of slaves as his fellow-servants in the letters of manumission declaring Thomas and Montana free and Roman citizens, " with a right to any money they have saved while servants of the Roman Church." He states the motive for this act of piety :

" Our Redeemer, the Maker of every creature, mercifully assumed our human flesh to break the bonds of slavery in which the devil held us, and by the grace of His Godhead He gave us back our liberty. And thus it is a wholesome deed to restore the liberty in which they were born to men whom Nature in the beginning brought forth free, and whom the law of nations has subjected to the yoke of slavery."

In St. Gregory's letters there are many allusions to the captives held to ransom in the Lombard wars. He spent large sums himself to procure their freedom. He was grateful when wealthy friends in Constantinople sent him money for this purpose. He authorized bishops—nay, he commanded them—to sell the sacred vessels of the sanctuary, only stipulating that the sale and the ransom must take place in the presence of the papal agent. After a terrible raid in the Campagna he writes to his rector there, Anthemius :

" You may estimate the grief in our heart by the greatness of the calamity. The magnificent Stephen, bearer of this letter, brings you money for the ransom of such free men as you know cannot buy their own freedom. Do not hesitate to spend it on slaves whose masters are too poor to redeem them. If any slaves have been taken from the Church lands, we blame your negligence. Write down, and bring it with you when you come to us, an exact account of those whom you ransom; their names, where they live, what they do. If any captive incurs danger through your negligence, we shall deal with you severely."

We find him writing to two men whom he thus restored to freedom. " Neither you nor your heirs shall at any time suffer the burden of repayment."

Jews might own land in Italy and form contracts with peasants for its cultivation. But the Roman law forbade Jews to own Christian slaves. The slaves of Jews who fled to sanctuary and asked for baptism might on no account be restored to their masters.

Things were otherwise in France. " We are amazed," wrote St. Gregory to Queen Brunehaut " we are amazed that in your kingdom Jews are allowed to own Christian slaves. For what are Christians but members of Christ? We know

well that you faithfully reverence Christ. How is it then that you allow His members to remain in the power of His enemies ? "

Jewish traders were not forbidden to traffic in slaves. But no Jew might keep a Christian in his market beyond forty days, or a slave wishful to become a Christian beyond the space of three months. If the sale was unduly delayed in either case, the slave recovered his liberty. When Narses, " that most wicked Jew," bought Christian slaves and employed them for his own advantage on his estates in Sicily, St. Gregory wrote at once to notify the governor of the island :

" Strictly and at once, Your Glory will inquire into this, and give the Christians their liberty, lest religion be dishonoured while they are subject to the Jew." For Narses was " liable to stripes " on other counts. He had set up an altar to Blessed Elias, and " impiously induced " Christians to worship there.

There were many Jews in Sicily settled on the Church lands. Peter the Sub-deacon is instructed to send circular letters to " the Jews on the patrimony who obstinately refuse to be converted," promising to reduce their rents by one-third if they become Christians. " For even if they themselves come into the Church with little faith, there will certainly be more

faith in their children who will thus be baptized and grow up Christians." This circular brought many Jews under instruction, and Gregory provided, at his own cost, baptismal robes for the poorer among them.

The Jews had settlements all over Christendom. In Africa they had all the slave-trade in their hands, at Alexandria all the commerce, in Spain all the agriculture. In Gaul their wealth was at the mercy (or caprice !) of king or local tyrant, and sometimes they had to choose between baptism and exile. By the laws of the empire they were cruelly taxed, excluded from civil or military dignities, forbidden to intermarry with Christians or to own Christian slaves. Their witness was not accepted in the law courts. In Italy the Jews were heartily disliked. In Spain the laws of Reccared outdid in harshness the Justinian code.

The Pope alone steadily set his face against proselytism by force. In every land the Jews unjustly treated appealed to Rome.

If their complaint was reasonable they were sure to find redress at his hands. His letters are always on the side of leniency and fair dealing. He writes to the Bishop of Arles :

" We hear from several Jews, who live in this province but travel from time to time to Marseilles, that many Jews, settled in those

parts, are brought to the baptismal font not so much by preaching as by force. Your intention, my dear brother, I believe to be praiseworthy, but I very much fear that the act will bring you no reward hereafter, and will indeed lead to the loss of the very souls you wish to save. I beg of Your Fraternity, therefore, to preach frequently to these persons, with such words as may burn away the thorns of error and enlighten the darkness of their minds, and with such sweetness and kindness as may soften their hearts and induce them, of their own accord, to change their life."

In the same spirit he exhorts the Bishop of Terracina: "It would be better for the Jews to come with kindly feelings to hear you preach the Word of God than that they should have cause to tremble at your inordinate severity."

The Jews at Terracina complained that the bishop had turned them out of their synagogue, because their singing could be heard in the church next door. "Build them another synagogue within the city," was Gregory's command. "We will not have the Hebrews oppressed and afflicted unreasonably. Let no man hinder them from managing their own affairs as they think best; for the Roman Law most justly grants them liberty of action."

He wrote in the same sense to the Bishop of

Naples : " Those who wish to restrain the Jews from practising their religion are clearly working for their own ends, not for God. Do not in future allow the Jews to be molested in the performance of their rites. Let them have full freedom to observe their festivals and holy days, as both they and their fathers have done for so long."

When the Bishop of Palmero seized a synagogue and consecrated it to Christian worship, the Pope insisted that all the furniture should be restored to the Jews, and the value of the building paid to them in full.

From Sardinia came the tale one Eastertide how the newly converted Peter had broken into the synagogue on the morrow of his baptism, and rendered it unclean in Jewish eyes by placing there a cross, a picture of the Mother of God, and the white robe that had been given him at the font. Gregory wrote at once to the Bishop Januarius :

" We charge you to remove from the synagogue the picture and the cross. The laws forbid the Jews to set up new synagogues, but they allow them to keep the old ones undisturbed. . . . Let Your Holiness then, with the aid of those who, like yourself, condemn Peter's violence, endeavour to make peace between the Jews and the Christians in your city. Especially

at this time, when there is every fear of a raid by the Lombards, you ought not to have a divided people."

Thus did St. Gregory make himself all things to all men, and in big things and in little, deal fairly with every one. Thus did he show himself consistently a true Christian and a sound theologian, a statesman moreover, with a thorough grasp of the principle that the strength of a state depends upon union among its citizens, and that this union can only exist when even-handed justice is meted out to everyone. He portrays himself, of course unconsciously, in the instruction he issues to that most intimately trusted of all his business-men, Peter the Sub-deacon, Rector of the Sicilian Patrimony.

" I trust that the glorious prætor and all the noble laymen will love you for your humility and not detest you for your pride. Yet if by any chance you learn that they deal unjustly with the poor, at once exchange your humility for firmness. Be their servants when they act aright, oppose them boldly when they act amiss. Yet show no weakness when you yield, nor give them cause to blame you as austere and unbending when you exercise power. In a word, let justice always season your humility, and humility always render your justice acceptable."

CHAPTER XII

THE THINGS THAT ARE CÆSARS.

LITTLE did St. Gregory dream, as he pored over his account books and prayed over his letters, that he was laying very solidly the foundations of that Temporal Power of the Holy See which was to outlast a thousand years, from the reign of Charlemagne to the reign of Pius IX.

He was himself, in a very real sense, the master at Rome ; providing supplies, organising defence, exacting obedience from officials, military and civil, his words and his wishes having weight with kings and queens. But both in the city and in every portion of the Patrimony of St. Peter he had to preach and to practise submission to the secular power. The Pope still owed allegiance to his sovereign at Constantinople, even though Maurice's inability to protect his Italian subjects often forced Gregory to act independently in their defence.

He was always extremely careful to avoid collision with the emperor's officers, or to interfere with them in the discharge of their

duties. But he would not wink at wrong-doing, however high in rank the offender. "The Lombards," he wrote, "can only kill our bodies, while the rapine and fraud of the imperial judges devour our souls."

Especially in the islands, because they were less in touch with Ravenna, the administration was hopelessly corrupt. Those whose duty it was to enforce the law did not always make a decent pretext to conceal their malpractices.

In 590 Gregory wrote a strong protest to the Duke of Sardinia, then to the exarch of Africa, the duke's immediate superior. Both letters were ignored. Next he instructed his apocrisarius to lay the case before the emperor. Finally he urged the empress, Constantia, to use her influence with her husband on behalf of the oppressed islanders.

"Since I know," he begins his letter, "that our Most Serene Lady turns her thoughts to the heavenly kingdom and to the life of her soul, I feel strongly that I should be guilty of grievous sin if I were silent when the Fear of God impels me to address her."

In Sardinia, he goes on, the governor sells to the pagans a licence to worship idols, and continues to collect this money from those who have been baptized. In Corsica the taxes are so heavy and so cruelly extorted,

that the people have to sell their sons into slavery.

"Hence it comes to pass that those who own estates in the island forsake the empire and pass over to the Lombards. For what outrage more cruel can the barbarians inflict on them?"

He complains, too, of the high-handedness of one Stephen, in Sicily. "His evil deeds would fill a volume."

"I beg our Most Serene Lady to investigate prudently these facts, and to still the groans of the oppressed. Had these evil doings come to your ears, they would long ago have been mentioned at a fitting moment to our Most Pious Lord, so that he might remove this great burden of sin from his soul, from his empire, and from his children. He may say indeed that all the money collected in these islands has been sent back to us for Italian expenses. It might be suggested to him to spend less in Italy, and to free his empire from the groans of the oppressed. It is certainly better that we should suffer some temporal loss in these parts than that you should be hindered in your salvation. Just think of it! Parents sell their children to save themselves from torture. You who have children of your own will soon find a means to remedy this state of things."

Perhaps in consequence of this letter Leontius came from Constantinople a little later to inquire into the state of the Italian Province. On his arrival in Sicily, Libertinus, who had held supreme command there for the last five years, fled to sanctuary, and came out to stand his trial only when the Pope had guaranteed he should have a fair hearing. All the papers on this case were sent on to Rome.

Libertinus seems to have governed fairly, for no one lodged complaints against him. He was accused of diverting public money to his private uses; but worthy men bore witness that he had spent more of his own money on the emperor's business than he was charged with taking from the emperor's treasury. Leontius, however, had him heavily fined, and scourged him moreover to make him confess he had embezzled the State funds.

St. Gregory wrote a very strong letter to Leontius: "When you scourge a free man you sully your own fair fame, you obscure the glory of the Most Religious Emperor. For there is this difference between the Roman emperor and other monarchs: he rules over free men, they rule over slaves. If you would not yourself be wronged by your superiors, you should respect with jealous care the liberty of those whom you are appointed to judge.

" You will tell me perhaps that public frauds cannot be detected without the scourge and torture. Well, I might admit that plea, were it not my lord Leontius who is concerned. For those who are too ready to use brute force are usually men lacking in intelligence, and without language at their command. But you can offer no such excuse. For God has given you wisdom enough to examine accounts with minute accuracy. No need of torture to extract information.

" My Glorious son, in your present commission, strive first of all to please God, and next to secure with the utmost zeal the interests of our Most Serene Lord. Indeed I feel that when he gives you work to do, you cannot neglect it."

Libertinus, notwithstanding, remained disgraced. We find Gregory exhorting him to bear patiently his tribulation and to give God thanks for it.

" Perhaps, Magnificent Son, you have offended Him somewhat when you were in power, and He sends this merciful bitterness to cleanse your soul. . . . I beg you not to be offended because we have written to Romanus, our defensor, to provide thirty suits of clothes for your household. Even so small a gift from the goods of the Blessed Apostle Peter should be accepted as a blessing, in token that he can

bestow greater favours here below and procure for us eternal benefits from Almighty God."

It was easier for St. Gregory to provide for Libertinus at his own expense than to awaken the emperor's conscience to a just consideration of his creditor's claims. As we have seen in a former chapter, he was at Constantinople when Maurice was crowned and wedded, and he assisted as godfather at the christening of his eldest son. Even thus early there were signs of miserliness, of that cheese-paring economy in the wrong direction which made Maurice unpopular with the soldiers, and in the end brought about his death. Hence the Pope's eagerness to encourage every spark of generous feeling: hence his overflow of gratitude when on one occasion Maurice sent an alms to relieve the poor at Rome. He is careful to give details as to "the faithful distribution of the thirty pounds of gold. . . .

"Whatever could be spared from the relief of the blind, the maimed and the infirm we gave to some religious women who fled to the city from the provinces after captivity. Thus not only poor citizens but also strangers have received the bounty of my Lord." The soldiers, too, received their arrears of pay, "and all, under due discipline, received with thanks the gift from their emperor, and repressed all

murmuring such as formerly used to prevail among them."

St. Gregory's position was of extreme delicacy. On the one hand Maurice, like a God-fearing Christian, recognised the Pope as his spiritual father, whose decision was final in matters of faith. On the other hand, his tendency to meddle in Church affairs grew in proportion as his authority in temporal matters declined. He never tampered with dogma, however ; and St. Gregory only resisted his decisions in points of discipline when such decisions were manifestly unjust, or, as he tactfully worded it, " obtained by misrepresentation."

Thus when Maurice deposed a bishop on account of ill-health, the Pope protested against such a breach of Canon Law. The bishop, he contended, should have been asked to resign or given a coadjutor. But he did not hinder the edict from taking effect.

" Our Most Religious Sovereign has power to do what he likes," he wrote on this occasion. " He may make what arrangements he deems fit. Only he must not expect the Apostolic See to help him to carry them out. If his action accords with Canon Law, we shall conform to it. If it does not, we shall submit to it, so far as we can without sin."

Maurice interfered but seldom in the quarrels

of the clergy. "He has no mind to burden himself with our sins," St. Gregory once wrote. When appeals reached Constantinople from the Churches in the African Province, they were always passed on to Rome. But the Pope had no intention of acting as the emperor's delegate in matters which were entirely within his own jurisdiction. So he forwarded them in his turn to some bishop in Sicily. Such roundabout appeals were so severely handled by Maximianus and his colleagues, that the appellants had cause to regret that they had not dealt directly with the Pope, as Canon Law required.

Our saint's longanimity was tried to the utmost in 593, when Natalis of Salona died and Maximus was intruded into this, the metropolitan See of Dalmatia. Maximus was an ambitious man, reported of evil life, but "popular with the palace and with the people." St. Gregory excommunicated the bishops who consecrated "the presumptuous intruder," in defiance of his express commands. He summoned Maximus to stand his trial at Rome, and forbade him to act as bishop, or to say Mass until his character was cleared.

"If you dare to disobey, anathema to you from God and St. Peter! Your punishment will serve as an example to the whole Church."

But Maximus appealed to the emperor, and

the Pope received an order to overlook the irregularities in his consecration, and to receive him with the honours due to the lawful metropolitan of Dalmatia.

St. Gregory refused point blank. He wrote to his apocrisarius, Sabinian :

" I am ready to die, rather than allow the Church of Blessed Peter to be thus degraded in my lifetime. You know me. I endure for a long time. But once I have made up my mind to resist, I face every danger with joy."

It was the empress, however, and not the apocrisarius, whom he requested to inform the emperor of his refusal.

" In obedience to my Most Religious Lord's command, I forgave Maximus his presumption in setting myself at nought, as completely as if he had been ordained bishop by my authority. But the impurity alleged against him, his bribery of electors, his celebration of Holy Mass while excommunicate, these things I cannot let pass without inquiry. It is my wish and my prayer that he may prove himself innocent, and that so the matter may end without danger to my soul. But my Most Serene Sovereign orders me to receive with honour, before judgment or even inquiry, a man accused of so many crimes. If the affairs of the bishops committed to my care are to be settled through the influence of

friends at the Court of our Most Pious Lords,* woe is me! Of what use am I in the Church?"

Maximus would not come to Rome. The journey through the Lombard lands was too dangerous for his witnesses, he declared. St. Gregory warned the Dalmatians to hold aloof from the clergy who upheld him in his obduracy.

"Avoid altogether those whom the Apostolic See does not receive, lest the very things in which you seek salvation be against you at the Judgment Seat of God."

The affair dragged on six years. Finally the Archbishops of Ravenna and Milan were delegated to try the case. In their presence Maximus purged himself publicly, by oath, of most of the crimes imputed to him, and confessed his sin of simony. For the space of three hours he lay prone upon his face before the bishops, the clergy and the exarch, lifting his head at intervals to cry aloud:

"I have sinned against God, and against the Most Blessed Pope Gregory."

And Gregory assured him by letter of forgiveness full and fatherly. "As soon as Your Fraternity knows that you are restored to communion with the Apostolic See, send someone to us who may bring you back the pallium."

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* Maurice's eldest son was also addressed as emperor.

It was not often, however, that our saint was forced thus directly to refuse obedience to the emperor's command. Even when Maurice issued an edict forbidding soldiers and civil servants to become monks, the Pope forwarded copies to the Italian bishops, before venturing on a respectfully worded protest, which he requested the court physician to present privately at a fitting moment. It is reasonable, he admits, that State officials should not be too readily received as monks, unless the monastery guarantees to pay their debts. The case of soldiers was on another plane.

" This law fills me with terror, for it bars the way to Heaven for many souls. Some men can lead a good life in the world ; others cannot be saved unless they renounce all they have to follow Jesus. I may not keep silence—dust and earthworm though I be in the sight of my Most Serene Lords—because I see this decree interferes with the rights of God, my Master and yours, Who has given you power over men so that you may make easy for them the way to Heaven. A decree has gone forth that no soldier may enlist in the army of the King of kings, unless he is disabled or too old to be of use in the army of an earthly king. . . ."

Then comes a personal appeal to the elder monarch :

"Thus does Christ speak to thee by my mouth: 'From a notary, Maurice, I have made thee Captain of the Guard, from captain Cæsar; from Cæsar Emperor, yea, and father of emperors yet to be. I have put My priests in thy power, and thou withdrawest thy soldiers from My service.' Most Pious Lord, what answer shalt thou make Him Who in the Day of Judgment will upbraid thee thus? I conjure thee, let not thy tears, thy fasts, thy many prayers avail thee nothing in the sight of God. Annul or modify this decree. For the army of my Master becomes stronger against the enemy when the army of God grows stronger in prayer."

In this case Maurice saw fit to compromise. St. Gregory again wrote round to the metropolitans, bidding them not to allow civil servants to enter monasteries until their accounts were audited and their debts to the State discharged. Ex-soldiers—men "branded in the hand"—are to have, like ex-slaves, three years' noviciate in secular dress. The emperor, he adds, will not find fault with this arrangement.

In writing to the emperor and indeed to dignitaries of every grade, St. Gregory punctiliously conforms his language to the rules of etiquette. His correspondents were Glorious, Illustrious, Magnificent, according to their rank, just as nowadays we have Right Honourable,

Most Noble, Your Grace, and the like. Especially in his letters to Maurice we are often reminded of Erasmus's sarcasm on the mode of addressing royalty in Renaissance days. "Kings are serene though they turn the world upside down in a storm of war, invincible though they fly from every battle-field, illustrious though they grovel in ignorance and vice, Catholic and Christian though they follow anything but Christ."

The courteous phrasing reads very like irony in St. Gregory's answer to "the most serene letter," in which the emperor has treated him as a fool and liar. He admits he is a fool "even if Your Clemency did not call me one," for who but a fool would have wearied himself in the emperor's interests and endured all that Gregory has endured "amid the swords of the Lombards."

But the charge of falsehood he will not dismiss thus lightly. He is a patriot, and his country is dragged daily deeper beneath the Lombard yoke, while the emperor prefers to believe the men who talk rather than the man who does. Furthermore, he is a priest.

"Although I am not worthy to be called a priest, I know that a priest is a servant of the Truth, and that it is a deadly insult to call a priest a liar. I plead to Your Clemency, not

for myself alone but on behalf of all priests. For I am a sinful man. I sin daily and many times a day, and I know that the suffering you cause me will avail me at the Judgment Seat of God. . . .

"Unworthy and sinful as I know myself to be, I trust more in the mercy of Jesus, when He comes to judge, than in the justice of Your Piety. Perhaps what you praise He will blame, and what you blame He will praise. I can but entreat Him with tears to guide with His own Hand our Most Clement Lord and to find him free from fault in the dread day of doom."

The hot letter which provoked this reply has not come down to us. Perhaps St. Gregory destroyed it in the last year of his life, when tidings reached him that Maurice had nobly merited in death the title "Most Religious" so often misapplied to him in life.

Things went from bad to worse with Maurice in the closing years of his reign. He chose his generals badly. He harassed his soldiers by unwise reforms, and whenever these reforms induced a mutiny the culprits received reward instead of punishment. His unpopularity had ebbed its lowest when the Avars marched on Constantinople, collecting booty and prisoners on their road through Thrace. Great sums of money were given them to save the city, but

Maurice refused to pay the small amount asked, over and above, as ransom for the twelve thousand soldiers who were prisoners of war. He argued, and perhaps with truth, that these men were cowards and mostly deserters.

But when the Avars massacred the twelve thousand in cold blood, the anger of his subjects equalled their contempt for his inability to conduct the campaign. The army was furious, and sent deputies to lay their grievances before the senate. But these deputies were treated with scorn; their spokesman, Phocas, was smitten in the face.

Grim famine stalked throughout the land that winter. The emperor was hooted and stoned as he walked barefoot through the streets of his capital in the procession on Christmas Eve. The army stationed in war-worn Thrace received neither pay nor supplies. Instead came the callous command: "Cross the Danube and quarter yourselves upon the Slavs."

There was open mutiny, of course, indeed concerted revolt. The army, Phocas at their head, marched on Constantinople.

"Who is this Phocas?" Maurice is said to have asked, and they told him Phocas was a coward.

"A coward?" he repeated sadly. "Then all the more likely to commit murder!"

And he spoke to his intimates of a dream, in which he saw himself standing, one of a crowd, before the great figure of Christ in molten bronze above his palace gateway.

"Bring forth Maurice!" came a terrible voice from the statue.

"O Lover of men!" he found voice to plead, "O Lord and Righteous Judge, punish me here, and not in the world to come."

And the Divine Voice gave sentence in gentler tone that Maurice with his wife and children and all his kin should be delivered into the hands of the soldier Phocas.

Deformed in body, sensuous in feature, with shaggy, scowling eyebrows, cruel mouth, coarse red hair, and on his cheek an ugly scar which turned black during his frequent bursts of anger, with neither charm of manner nor grace of intellect to recommend him; such was Phocas when the Patriarch Cyriacus placed the crown upon his head.

The citizens accepted quietly the new ruler whom the army imposed upon them. But when Phocas took his seat for the first time in the imperial box at the Hippodrome, a mocking cry arose:

"Begone Tyrant! Maurice is still alive!"

That cry was the death-knell of the dynasty. Not only did the dethroned emperor taste of

death, but his wife, his brother, his sons and three of his daughters shared his doom.

Four of his children were butchered before his eyes. The youngest was a baby in arms, and the nurse tried to substitute her own child in his stead. But Maurice rose superior to the promptings of nature, and himself revealed the heroic fraud. A noble and pathetic figure he stood, erect and dry-eyed, on that foggy winter's morning by the seashore.

"Thou art just, O Lord, and all Thy judgments righteous!" These were the only words that issued from his lips; and these he repeated over and over again, while the soldiers hacked the young princes into pieces and flung quivering fragments of their flesh in his face.

He was himself the last to be killed. Then the bodies were thrown into the sea, and the heads exposed in Constantinople to the insults of the mob.

A letter of St. Gregory's, dated two months later, shows that he then believed Maurice to be alive "and his life very necessary to the world."

Phocas was crowned on the 23rd of November and Maurice was murdered on the 27th. It was not until the 25th of April that news of the revolution reached Rome, and then St. Gregory only heard what Phocas chose he should hear.

For the Holy See was unrepresented at the Court of Constantinople—Maurice's dictatorial eccentricities having rendered the post of Apocrisarius so unpleasant that not one among the Roman clergy was willing to undertake its duties. Besides, there were no sailings from the Bosphorus in the winter months, and the Pope's friends at Constantinople would write on things indifferent, if at all, for their letters might fall into the hands of an unscrupulous and suspicious tyrant. The overland post was tedious as well as risky. Later in the century (678 and 686) we find emperors writing to Popes who had died six months and four months before.

Etiquette required that the Pope should send suitable replies to the "favourable letters" which the envoys brought him from the newly-crowned emperor and empress. As might be expected the wording of these replies is very wary. Gregory knew nothing about Phocas except that he was lawfully elected and crowned, and very powerful for good or ill. One short sentence alluded to the "yoke of tribulation" while Maurice and his deputies misgoverned. One short sentence congratulated Phocas on his advent to power. Then came a series of pious hopes that all the virtues may unite in Phocas, and the blessing of heaven gladden his dominions.

"May the whole Commonwealth rejoice at your kindly deeds. . . . May all the citizens enjoy without trembling their own property which they have honestly acquired. Under the rule of Your Piety may each one's liberty take out a new lease. . . . For there is this difference between the kings of other nations and the Emperor of the Roman Republic: they are lords of slaves, he rules over free men. . . . But we can say all this better in prayer to God, than by expressing our hopes to you. May Almighty God, in your every thought and word, hold the heart of Your Piety in the Hand of His Grace."

Boniface, afterwards Pope, was at once despatched to Constantinople as apocrisarius, and St. Gregory soon learned from his letters how deplorably the new emperor fell short of his ideal. Never again did he write directly to Phocas, never once did he mention the revolution in his other letters.

The Pope's prudence and the tact of his delegate came noticeably into play when a certain bishop of Euria appealed to the emperor from the decision of his metropolitan, and obtained, in consequence, lands which St. Gregory deemed should belong to the diocese of Corcyra, "according to ecclesiastical justice and canonical reasoning." He could not allow

the injustice to pass unrebuked, so he instructed Boniface to bring pressure to bear upon Phocas.

"We foresee that our sentence will fail in its effect if we appear to be acting contrary to the commands of our Most Gracious Lord the Emperor, or in contempt of his commands, which God forbid! Wherefore, beloved, discreetly insinuate to His Piety, and constantly reiterate, that it is altogether evil, altogether unjust, and completely at variance with the sacred canons, and that therefore he should not allow a sin of this kind to be introduced into the Church in his time. . . . Exert your vigilance, with the help of Almighty God, so that this shameful business may not serve as a precedent."

We know not how the incident ended, but we know that Phocas held Boniface in high esteem. When the apocrisarius in due course became Pope, the emperor proclaimed, on his own initiative, that the See of Rome was at the head of all the Churches.

To understand all the importance of this decree we must have a clear notion of St. Gregory's famous controversy with John the Faster, patriarch of Constantinople.

CHAPTER XIII

THE EMPERORS' BISHOP.

THE Temporal Power of the Popes was not yet. The spiritual supremacy of the Roman See was unquestioningly recognised throughout the Christian world.

"When it is a question of a fault," wrote St. Gregory, "I know of no bishop who is not subject to the Apostolic See." In his letters, "the Apostolic See is the head of the faithful," because its ruler "holds the place of Peter, Prince of the Apostles." Hence the bishop who disobeys the Pope "is separated from the peace of Blessed Peter," and "no acts of any Council are of force to bind, without the consent and authority of the Apostolic See."

All the Churches acknowledged the claim and found it to their advantage. "I defend my own rights," wrote St. Gregory to Dominic of Carthage, "and I am just as careful to maintain the rights of other bishops." He reminded Peter the Subdeacon, his business-man in Sicily, "Just because all the Churches show such reverence to the Apostolic See, it behoves us to

show solicitude where their interests are concerned."

We have watched him at work in his own episcopal city. We have noted his care to leave the bishops in his Western Patriarchate a free hand in the government of their Churches ; only if " the hungry flock looked up and were not fed," did the Shepherd of shepherds intervene. We have now to consider him as " a very wakeful shepherd and governor " to his fellow-patriarchs in the East.

Originally there were three patriarchal Sees : Jerusalem, founded by St. James the Less ; Alexandria, St. Mark's diocese ; Antioch, where St. Peter at one time set up his chair. The patriarch of Jerusalem was the only one without bishops and metropolitans under his jurisdiction ; the others regulated matters of discipline and adjusted differences in the provinces subject to their sway. Only in questions of faith, or in cases of grave scandal, did the Roman Pontiff come in contact with the dioceses in the East.

But every bishop in the Christian world had the right of appeal to the Holy See. Thus we find St. Gregory at first sifting the case of Adrian, Bishop of Thebes, and then writing sternly to Adrian's primate, John, Bishop of Prima Justiniana :

" We have quashed your decrees and annulled

your sentence. And now, by the authority of Blessed Peter, Prince of the Apostles, we forbid you Holy Communion for the space of thirty days, which we wish you to spend in penance and contrition, craving forgiveness of God. If we learn that you are remiss in carrying out our sentence, we shall, by the help of the Lord, punish still more severely not only Your Fraternity's injustice but also your contumacy."

In the early centuries Byzantium was a suffragan See in the province of Heraclea. It only reached patriarchal rank in 381, when the Eastern bishops met in synod at Constantinople and anathematized its bishop, Macedonius, who denied the divinity of the Holy Ghost. A curious occasion, one would think, for raising the status of the See which he had thus disgraced.

This synod of Constantinople ranks as the third General Council of the Church, solely because its decision on dogma was ratified later by Rome and the West. Its regulations affecting local discipline have not œcumenical value.

The fifth General Council also, which met at Chalcedon in 451, consisted mainly of Eastern prelates. But Pope St. Leo the Great sent his legates to preside, and they took precedence of all present, as a matter of course. The divinely-given primacy of St. Peter was acknowledged in

plain terms, and the title " œcumenical bishop " suggested, to differentiate the Pope from the rest of the hierarchy.

St. Leo refused the new title. He formally rejected also the 28th Canon inserted in the Acts of the Council, without the knowledge of his legates :

" The patriarch of Constantinople is to enjoy a similar primacy to that of imperial Rome—for Constantinople is New Rome—and shall be mighty in Church affairs as she is, and shall be second after her."

From this date onward, however, the Popes recognised Constantinople as a patriarchal see. But they refused to consider seriously its claim to control ecclesiastical affairs all over the East.

With the other patriarchs St. Gregory was always on friendly terms. On one occasion he testified to the purity of faith in the Church of Jerusalem. On another, he interposed as peace-maker between its patriarch and a certain abbot.

" I know that you are both of you mortified men, both humble, both salt of good savour in the preaching of the word. . . . I love you both, and am much afraid lest the sacrifice of your prayers be marred by any dissension."

Anastasius of Antioch, and Eulogius of Alexandria, were his personal friends.

Anastasius found in him an effective champion when unjustly in disgrace with the emperor.

"Lo, in your old age," wrote the Pope, "Your Blessedness labours under many tribulations. But remember in whose chair you sit. Is it not his to whom it was said, 'When thou art old, another shall gird thee and carry thee whither thou wouldst not?'"

"There is a peculiar tie between Rome and Alexandria," he wrote to Eulogius, "which compels us to love it in a very special way. Whatever good I hear of you I impute it to myself. And if you hear anything good of me, impute that to your merits."

He often consulted this patriarch on points of doctrine, for Eulogius was a ripe scholar, well read in the writings of those Fathers of the Church who praised God in Greek.

It was to safeguard the rights of Antioch and Alexandria that Pelagius II had lodged his formal protest against the title universal (or œcumenical) bishop, which a local synod in 588 conferred upon John the Faster.

This monk of mortified life, but arrogant in his pretensions, and very rigid towards his underlings, became patriarch of Constantinople while St. Gregory was there as apocrisarius. We have already quoted from the friendly letter in which our saint announced to John his own

election to the Holy See. He wrote again, and in terms of stinging sarcasm, when two priests appealed to Rome against the cruel treatment meted out to them in Constantinople :

" I have written several letters to my most holy brother, the Lord John, but I am utterly mistaken in the opinion I have formed of him, if he really wrote the letter I received in reply. . . . "

For the priest Athanasius had been beaten with rods in Santa Sofia, and John said he knew nothing about it.

" My brother John must know what goes on in his own Church," St. Gregory continues. " If he tells me he knoweth not, what answer am I to give ? Most holy brother, is this the outcome of your fasting, that you pretend to be ignorant of the injury done to your brother ? Would it not be better that meat should enter your mouth than that falsehood should issue therefrom ? . . . But God forbid that I should believe this evil of your holy heart. Those letters indeed were signed with your name, but I think they must have been written by that young man of yours, who neither trembles before God nor blushes before man, who is accused of heinous crimes. . . . If you listen to him, I know that you cannot live in peace with your brethren. . . .

"As for the scourging you inflicted I need say no more. For I have sent on business, to the court of our Sovereign, Sabinian the deacon, my beloved son; and he will discuss the matter with you thoroughly. I trust that he, at all events, will find in my Lord John, the man whom I knew when I myself was in the royal city."

In one of the letters connected with this case John styled himself "almost in every line," œcumenical or universal patriarch. To keep silence would imply consent, and in Gregory's conscience "to admit this degrading title would be to sin against the Faith." For the title was intended to bring the other patriarchs under the jurisdiction of Constantinople, and to prevent the Pope from intervening in the affairs of the Eastern Churches.

He wrote at once to the offender: "My brother, love humility, and do not try to raise yourself by lowering your brethren. Refrain from using this rash name, this word of pride and folly which is disturbing the whole Church. . . . I have endeavoured once or twice, through my delegates, to correct by humble words. Now I write myself. And if my correction is treated with contempt, it remains for me to employ the Church. . . ."

This letter was enclosed in another to

Sabinian, with orders to give it into the patriarch's own hand :

" I marvel how you could so easily be deceived, my friend, as to suffer our Lord the Emperor to write admonishing me to live in peace with the patriarch. You should have explained that there would be peace between us at once, if he would but drop the proud title. You have no idea, I can see, of the crafty way in which our brother John has contrived to put me in a dilemma. Either I must defer to the emperor's wish and so confirm the patriarch in his vanity, or not defer to it and so rouse the emperor's anger against myself. But we shall steer a straight course in the fear of God alone. Do you likewise, dear friend, fear no man. You have full authority to do whatever has to be done in this affair."

His letter to the emperor is perhaps the most moving he ever penned. The peace of the State, he argues, depends upon peace within the Church.

" What might of fleshly arm would dare to attack your dominions and put your subjects to the sword, if all the priests strove with one accord, as they ought, to win God's favour for you by their prayers and virtuous life. But while we, unworthy bishops, neglect what befits us and are absorbed in what befits us not, we

make our sins the allies of the Avars. Our bodies are worn away with fasting, our hearts are fat with pride. We lie on ashes and yearn for the things that are above us. We clothe ourselves in humble garb, but in arrogant conceit we surpass those who go clad in purple. We teach humility and our behaviour belies our words. We hide the teeth of a wolf behind the face of a sheep. We may indeed deceive men, but our iniquity is manifest in the sight of God. Therefore, He hath inspired our Most Religious Lord to re-knit the hearts of bishops in true concord. . . .

" Behold all Europe is under the heel of the Barbarians. Cities are destroyed. There are no peasants left to till the fields. Idolatry is rampant. And yet the bishops who ought to be weeping, stretched in ashes upon the ground, devise for themselves names of vanity, and glory in vain titles !

" Most Religious Lord, am I defending my own cause ? Am I avenging a wrong done to myself alone ? No. It is the cause of God, it is the cause of the universal Church. We know, for a certainty, that bishops of Constantinople have fallen into the whirlpool of heresy. Nestorius and Macedonius are become not merely heretics but heresiarchs. If these were universal bishops, the universal Church would

have been overthrown when they fell. . . . Far from all Christian hearts be that blasphemous title,by which one bishop madly arrogates all honour to himself. It is true this title was offered to the Roman Church at the Council of Chalcedon, but none of the Roman Pontiffs ever consented to use it, lest all other bishops be deprived of the honour which is justly their due.

" I, for my part, am the servant of all priests so long as they behave like priests. But as for the man who puffed with vain-glory, arches his neck against Almighty God and against the ordinances of the Fathers, I trust in God's help, that he shall never make me bend my neck to him, no not with swords."

By the same courier he wrote to the empress. He seemed to fear for her the glamour of the patriarch's ascetic life :

" I beseech you, let no man's hypocrisy prevail against the truth. I know that my most holy brother, John, is trying to gain the emperor's ear. But I trust my Lord will not be cajoled against reason, and hurt his own soul by suffering this man's perverse pride to pollute his reign. . . . Do not consent to this wicked title. For though the sins of Gregory deserve this treatment, the Apostle Peter does not deserve to be thus humiliated in his person."

This series of letters may have impressed the

patriarch. But on John the Faster's death in 595, Cyriacus, his successor, "clung to the name of pride," and the emperor sent the Pope a peremptory order to make no further disturbance about a mere word.

"A mere word!" St. Gregory was quick to retort. "When Antichrist comes and calls himself *God*, that too will be a mere word, yet one exceedingly pernicious. I say it with assurance: he who lets himself be called universal bishop forestalls Antichrist, because in his pride he sets himself above all others."

The epithet to which he objected so strongly was in Latin, *universal*, in Greek *oecumenical*. In one sense "overseer of all the bishops in Christendom," it belonged to the Pope and to him alone. But as Gregory understood it, it meant sole bishop, with the world for his diocese, and all other bishops merely his agents, without rights and responsibilities of their own. "If there be but one universal bishop (he is writing as a metropolitan), it follows that you yourselves are not bishops at all."

For the Greeks, on the other hand, it is quite possible that "*oecumenical*" applied only to the "Home States," the portion of Christendom included in the Empire. It is quite possible, and even probable, that the patriarch of Constantinople merely aimed at holding with regard to

the patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem, the same position that the Pope was acknowledged to hold with regard to the bishops of the universal Church.

Small help did the Pope receive from these patriarchs, whose battle he was fighting.

"Stand firm," he exhorted them, "never answer or sign any letter in which this lying title occurs. . . . Preserve the bishops under you from the pollution of this pride. Persecution may result. If so let us show by our union in death that we prefer the common good to our personal interests. Pray for me, as becomes your dearest Holiness, that I may prove by deeds what I thus dare to say."

Anastasius of Antioch saw no danger in the word, and told him so. "You ought not to have said that the matter is of no importance," the Pope wrote in reply. "If we endure this calmly we corrupt the faith of the whole Church. To say nothing of the injury to your own office, if one bishop is called universal, the whole Church collapses when the universal one fails in faith. And you know that heretics and even heresiarchs have before now held sway in the See of Constantinople."

Eulogius of Alexandria promised he would obey the Pope's injunction. St. Gregory was not satisfied with the wording of his letter.

"Your Blessedness has not taken the trouble to remember accurately what I tried to impress upon you when last I wrote. I said you ought not to apply the proud title to me, or to anyone else. Yet in the very first line of your reply, you address me as universal Pope! I beg your gentlest Holiness, whom I love so dearly, never to do this again. What you give so unreasonably to another you take away from yourself. I do not wish for an honour by which my brethren lose that honour which is their due. My honour is the honour of the whole Church. My honour is the united strength of my brother bishops. Then am I truly honoured when the honour due to each one is not withheld. Now if Your Holiness calls me universal Pontiff, you deny to yourself the thing [episcopal jurisdiction] about which you call me universal. Cease using words which inflate vanity and wound fraternal love."

CHAPTER XIV

SERVANT OF THE SERVANTS OF GOD.

ST. LEO THE GREAT was not the only Pope who refused the title of universal bishop. The Eastern prelates applied it successively to Hormisdas, Agapetus and Boniface II, but these Pontiffs never encouraged the novel mode of address. St. Gregory was not satisfied with merely lodging his formal protest. He assumed a title which the arrogance of Constantinople dared not copy. He was the first Pope to sign himself habitually, "Servus Servorum Dei."

The phrase sums up his pontificate. We reverence him, and rightly, as one of the great doctors of the Church—one of the greatest, precisely because he expressed the truths of religion in very simple language for the average man to understand. He preached and he wrote always with an eye to the needs of his audience. His book on Job was suited to the educated among the devout: he blamed a bishop who used it as the groundwork of his sermons. His own homilies were always homely, heart-to-heart talks with his flock. One feels inclined

to apply to them, in all reverence, his own remark on the diction of Holy Writ: "Our Heavenly Father lisps to us, his little children, in baby language, that so He may make His meaning understood."

But it is in his letters that the holy Pope shows himself all in all to any individual member of his world-wide flock who might stand in need of his charitable ministrations. The phrase "your fellow-servant" was no mere trick of rhetoric in his letters of manumission to Thomas and Montana.

"Why do you call yourself my handmaid?" he writes to the noble matron, Rusticiana. "The burden of my episcopal office makes me the servant of all mankind, and even before I was a bishop, I was always ready to serve you."

Rusticiana was the widow of his kinsman, the famous Boëthius. She may have caressed St. Gregory in his infancy; for she was in Rome during Totila's war, spending her great wealth lavishly to relieve the poor. But it was at Constantinople that acquaintance ripened into friendship; for she was living there with her daughter Eusebia when Gregory came as nuncio. He feared for her the glamour of the gay metropolis. In one of her letters she told him of her travels in the Holy Land.

" Believe me," he wrote in reply, " I should like to have gone with you, but I should never have hurried home as quickly as you did. I find it hard to believe that you really have visited the holy places, and yet left them so soon to come back to Constantinople. The love of that city is indeed firmly rooted in your heart, and I shrewdly suspect Your Excellency did not give your whole attention to the sacred shrines ! . . . May Almighty God mercifully enlighten you with wisdom and piety, and grace to feel how fleeting are the things of time. For very soon, Death and the Judgment after death will force you to loosen your hold on worldly gaieties."

In another letter he urges her to come to Rome. The Romans still hold her in grateful memory, he writes, and a visit to the threshold of the Holy Apostles (*ad limina*) will greatly benefit her soul.

" You need not fear the wars in Italy ; for St. Peter wonderfully protects his city, shrunken as it is in population and bereft of military aid. We invite you out of our great love. May God grant you whatever He sees best for the good of your soul and the welfare of your household."

Rusticiana did not come to Rome. She sent instead rich gifts to adorn the basilicas.

Gregoria, his godchild perhaps, is gently dealt with, when she endeavours to entangle him in her scruples.

"In the welcome letter which Your Sweetness wrote me, you strive your utmost to accuse yourself of a crowd of sins. But I know that you love God fervently, and I know also that the lips of Eternal Truth have said of the Magdalen: 'Many sins are forgiven her, because she hath loved much.'"

Gregoria had asked the Pope for an authoritative pronouncement as to the state of her soul in the Sight of God.

"Your request is difficult and useless," he replies. "Difficult, because I do not deserve to have such a secret revealed to me; useless, because it would not be good for you to feel secure about your sins, until you have no longer eyes to weep for them. Do not wish, my sweet daughter, for an assurance that might make you negligent in the service of God. Be satisfied to remain anxious yet a little while, on earth, that so you may rejoice throughout eternity in the security of the saints."

He held in very high opinion Theoctista, the empress's sister, who was governess to the imperial children.

"Why are you so reluctant to tell me about our Serene Lady?" he writes. "Does she read

studiously? Does her reading help her to compunction? You ought to watch very carefully whether she weeps for her sins out of fear or out of love. By the grace of God you have experienced both forms of compunction, and you should consider carefully, day by day how your words may best benefit our Most Serene Lady. Your company ought to do her much good amid the turmoil of business which draws her incessantly to exterior things."

"Instruct carefully the young princes whom you educate," he writes again. Let them learn well the things that will move them to love one another, and to treat their underlings with gentleness, lest any hatred commence in them now and afterwards break out openly. . . . The words of nurses will be milk if good, but poison if evil."

In another letter he refers to "a storm of calumny" which "to her no small disgust" the princess had to endure. "God often permits trials of this kind, lest excessive praise engender pride in His elect, who need these bitter draughts occasionally to keep their souls in health. Besides, there would be no scope for patience if we had nothing to endure. It needed a brother like Cain to bring out all that was good in Abel."

However, he would not have her remain entirely passive, especially as her orthodoxy was called in question.

" When we can still the murmurs of foolish people and bring them back to a healthy frame of mind, we certainly ought not to allow them to remain scandalized. Of your own accord, therefore, invite your leading accusers to a private interview, and anathematize in their presence those perverse opinions which they say you hold. Do not deem it degrading to give them this satisfaction, nor suffer any feelings of scorn for them to linger in your mind. I remember you are of the imperial family, but we are all brethren, created by the Power and redeemed by the Blood of the same Sovereign God. The words of detractors, as well as your own good deeds, will add to the glory of your Heavenly Crown."

The empress Constantia wrote to him in 594 to ask him for the head of St. Paul. He refused point blank.

" You require of me what I cannot and dare not do. The bodies of the Blessed Peter and Paul are glorified in their Churches by such miracles and awful prodigies that no one approaches them without great care." He instances cases of sudden death when the relics were touched even inadvertently or through

motives of piety. "When the Romans give relics of the saints they do not venture to touch any part of the body; but they give instead cloths (brandea) which have been placed on the tomb. Certain Greeks once expressed doubts of the efficacy of such relics; but, according to the tradition handed down by our ancestors, Pope Leo, of blessed memory, took shears and cut the cloth; and as he cut it blood flowed forth. In the regions round Rome, and indeed throughout the West, it is considered sacrilege to touch the bodies of saints, a sacrilege that never remains unpunished. We can scarcely believe the Greeks when they tell us they are in the habit of moving the bones of the saints. . . . However, as the pious wishes of my Most Serene Lady ought not to be wholly without fruit, I am sending you, as soon as possible, a portion of the chains which St. Paul wore upon his neck and hands—that is if I succeed in filing off a portion. For many persons beg for filings of these chains, and in some cases the priest detaches them quite easily, in others the file is worked a long time over the chains without the least success."

In 603 he hears that Eulogius, patriarch of Alexandria, has trouble with his eyesight. "I send you a small cross," writes the Pope, "with filings from the chains of the Apostles

St. Peter and St. Paul, who love you well. Apply it to your eyes, for many miracles are wrought by this gift."

He sends similar filings in a key to Theoctista, and tells her how a Lombard, during the sack of a city, cut open the reliquary with his knife. "Forthwith the devil entered into him and constrained him to draw the knife across his own throat." So terrified were the Lombards that King Authari sent the key to the Pope, with another like it, and an account of the whole affair.

In one of his homilies on the Gospel, St. Gregory points out to his people that each one of us has received at least one talent which he must use for the honour of God and the profit of his neighbour.

"A man's talent may be some friend, plentifully endowed with the goods of this world, and it behoveth him to use his talent and to intercede with this friend on behalf of the poor."

His letters testify that he practised what he preached. Vast sums of money reached him from his friends in Constantinople to help his charities. And he thanked as gracefully as he begged. We find him writing to the emperor's physician:

"Besides rendering my account to God of the

revenues of Holy Church, I have now to answer to Him for the goods of my sweet son Theodore. Pray for us that we may not spend the fruit of your labour indiscreetly, where no real need exists, and thus increase our own sins by the very alms which lessens yours."

Theodore, who had great influence over Maurice, was his good friend at Court in many a delicate predicament. But our holy Pope did not write to him merely to ask a favour or to thank for an alms.

"I have a complaint to lodge against the gentle soul of my most glorious son, the Lord Theodore. He has received from the Holy Trinity the gift of intellect, the gift of wealth, the gift of mercy and of love. And yet he is so engrossed with his work and with Court functions as to negect to read daily in the Holy Scriptures. Now, if you were absent from Court and received a letter from our Lord the Emperor, you would not sleep, you would not eat till you had mastered its contents. The Emperor of Heaven, the Lord of angels and of men, sends you in Holy Writ His letters for the saving of your soul, and yet, my glorious son, you do not read them with all diligence. Study them, I pray you. Learn from God's Words to know God's Heart, and to yearn more ardently for the delights of heaven. For your soul will rejoice in a deeper

rest hereafter, if here below you give yourself no rest in the love and praise of God. May He fill your mind with His presence and so relieve it from all care."

St. Gregory mentions in one of his letters that he knew but one prefect who retired from office with untarnished honour. He was not likely, therefore, to help his friends to posts of dignity.

"You ask me to recommend you to the emperor," he writes to a man named Andrew. "I am greatly grieved, because I always thought you had noble aspirations. I have known many men employed in the service of the State, who bitterly bewailed that they had no leisure to attend to their souls. When a man holds office under our most religious sovereign, how greatly is his mind absorbed in the pursuit of his prince's favour, and when that is gained, how greatly does he fear to lose it. It is grievous that a man should thus waste his life, longing for prosperity or trembling lest adversity befall. I advise Your Greatness to lead a peaceful and quiet life, in some pleasant, retired spot, where you may study and meditate, inflame your heart with the love of eternity, do good with the wealth at your command, and look forward with hope to heaven as your reward for doing good. I say this, my noble son, because I love

you greatly. I see you drifting into a stormy sea, and I throw out my words like ropes to draw you ashore, where you may rest and appreciate the evils you have escaped and the good things you will enjoy."

Sometimes he had real sins to cope with in his letters, not merely a slackening in the pursuit of perfection.

" I am told," he writes to Clementina, " that when anyone offends you, you brood over the injury and will not forgive. If this is true I am very sorry, for I love you, and I entreat you to expel nobly this rancour from your soul. Do not allow the tares of the enemy to grow up among your wheat. Repeat the Lord's Prayer, and let not the trespass have greater weight with you than the duty of forgiveness. Conquer ill-deeds by kindness, win the offender by salutary forbearance, forgive him and he will feel ashamed, retain no feeling that may give him pain. We have sometimes to punish and to punish severely; but once the fault is corrected we have no right to withhold our friendliness from the wrong-doer."

Such was his own unvarying practice. When Maximus of Salona found his coveted bishopric no bed of roses, Gregory helped him with sympathy and fatherly advice. The Slavs were harrying Istria, and its bishop was harassed by

the Gentiles without and by the governors within.

"Do not grieve overmuch," wrote Gregory, "for those who come after us will see yet worse times, and think our age happy in comparison with theirs. But as far as you can, my brother, you must resist these men on behalf of the oppressed. Even if you fail in your effort, Almighty God is satisfied with the intention which He has Himself inspired. . . . Yet season your zeal with mildness, lest if you act too rigidly men should think you are puffed up with a young man's pride. When we defend the weak against the strong, the oppressed must feel sure that we are really helping them, and the oppressors, howsoever evilly inclined towards us, must find nothing to blame in our conduct."

He then gives advice on how to deal with schismatics and malcontents. "If however any of these wish to come to me with complaints of you, do nothing to hinder their journey. Trust me to give them complete satisfaction, or else be sure they will never see their country again while you are alive."

When St. Gregory was himself in the wrong he never hesitated to make generous amends. He wrote in one of his letters to Peter the Sub-deacon:

"I am greatly grieved because I rebuked

Pretiosus too severely, and sent him away in bitterness and sorrow. I asked my Lord Bishop Maximianus to send him back to me, but he was very unwilling to do so. Now I do not wish to annoy the bishop; busy as he is in the work of God, he needs to be strengthened and encouraged, not thwarted. And yet Pretiosus is very sad because he cannot come to me. If you have more wisdom in your little body than I have in my big one, arrange the matter so that I may have my wish without inconvenience to my Lord Bishop. But let the matter drop if you see it worries him."

The Pope sometimes blamed his bishops for lack of zeal, but never for lack of success. He wrote to Domitian, metropolitan of Armenia, a respected kinsman of the Emperor Maurice:

"I grieve indeed that the emperor of the Persians was not converted, but I greatly rejoiced that you preached before him the Faith of Christ. For though he did not merit to reach the light of truth, yet your holiness will be rewarded for your efforts on his behalf. For the Ethiopian goes into the bath black and comes out of it black, but for all that the bath-man gets his fee."

For other instances of Gregory's delicate treatment of individual souls we must, in the words of his mediæval biographer, John the

Deacon,* "refer the eye of the reader to the abundant fulness of his venerable register." Eight hundred and fifty letters have come down to us in the fourteen books of this register—one book for each year of his pontificate—yet he himself refers to seventy-seven other letters of his of which no copies have been thus recorded.

And while he thus catered constantly for the spiritual health and comfort of his many friends, the holy Pope was not unmindful of their bodily ills. When he heard that Marinianus of Ravenna was vomiting blood, he consulted the most skilful physicians in Rome.

"They all prescribe rest and silence," he wrote, "and I doubt much whether Your Fraternity can obtain either in your Church." So the archbishop is to arrange for the administration of his diocese, and come to Rome before the summer heats. "I wish to take your illness under my especial care, and secure rest for you. The doctors say that summer is the most dangerous season for one with your disease. So if you should be called away, Our Lord will take you from my arms. I am myself in very

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* St. Gregory the Great had at least two biographers in deacon s orders. Paul Warnfred 730—796, and John who wrote in 872.

weak health. If God were to call me before you, I should like to pass away in your arms. Bring few people with you, for you are to lodge in my own house. If you feel better and defer your journey, remember that I strictly forbid you to fast oftener than five days in the year. And, beloved, do not undertake any labour beyond your strength."

St. Gregory might thus exhort, but he struggled gallantly through his own work, despite the ill-health on which we have enlarged elsewhere. Many letters, especially in his later years, were dictated from the bed where he lay, writhing in agony and groaning to alleviate his pain. In one of his last letters he wrote to Queen Theodolind :

" The gout has gripped us. We are so weak that we can scarcely speak, much less dictate on business matters. We call to witness your own messengers, the bearers of this. For when they arrived they found us sick ; and now they depart, leaving us in the greatest danger and crisis of life."

We have no details as to the death-bed of this holy Pope. It was, we learn from his epitaph, on the 12th of March, 604, in the sixty-fifth year of his age and the fourteenth of his pontificate, that " the Consul of God went to enjoy everlasting triumph." His funeral was

simple, as he himself had arranged a Pope's funeral should always be. In death at least, he decreed, all pomp should cease.

"Whereas the faithful venerate us, unworthy though we be, with the reverence due to the Blessed Apostle Peter, we ought always to consider our infirmity and studiously to decline the burden of this reverence. . . . From the love of the faithful the custom has arisen of paying an undeserved honour to the rulers of his see. When their bodies are carried to the tomb, they are covered with dalmatics, and these dalmatics the people tear to shreds and divide among themselves devoutly as something sacred. Yea, although there be in the city many coverings from the sacred bodies of the Apostles and martyrs, men take from the bodies of sinners these shreds which they store up with feelings of deep reverence."

That year the vines in Italy were killed by frost, and mice and rust destroyed the crops of corn. "It was right and seemly," is the comment of Paul the Deacon, "that men should hunger and go athirst, seeing that the death of Gregory deprived the faithful of spiritual food and drink." There was dearth in Rome, and now that he was not there to organize, the relief measures did not cope with the distress.

One legend tells us how St. Gregory appeared in vision to the reigning Pope, Sabinian, and rebuked him sharply for withdrawing the doles which he himself had been wont to distribute by means of his monasteries, guest-houses, deaconries and hospitals. According to another legend, the fickle populace blamed the dead Pope, not the living one, for the suffering in Rome. The treasury of the Holy See was empty, they declared, because Gregory, "for the glory of his own praise," had squandered the Roman revenues in indiscreet hospitality, and scattered money broadcast in largesse throughout the world.

And so mob law decreed that his memory should not live, and bonfires were kindled to burn his writings. At last Peter, his friend and confidential secretary, succeeded in gaining a hearing. He told how the saint sat behind a curtain while dictating to him his homilies on Ezechiel. As Gregory kept silence for long intervals, his servant made a hole in the curtain with his pen, and peeping through the slit he saw the Pope, his hands lifted in prayer and a snow-white dove perching on his head. "Whenever the Blessed Gregory hesitated, the dove applied its beak to his ear. The Pope found out that his secretary had peeped, and strictly enjoined him to keep the matter secret. 'The

day you make it known,' he told him, 'you shall die a sudden death.' "

Peter offered to swear on the Holy Gospels that what he said was true. If he lived till the morrow he would burn the books with his own hands. If he died as foretold, the Romans promised they would not injure a single book. "Amid the words of his true confession he breathed forth his spirit," a valiant witness to truth and friendship.

Legends of the saints are usually meant to point a moral. A man's life was well worth losing to preserve to the Church the works of St. Gregory—in very truth "the precious life-blood of a master-spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life." His writings retain their hold upon Christian readers, however cynically such men as Gibbon may sneer at them as "innocent of any classic taste in literature." Our own Alfred translated his *Pastoral Rule,* and made use of it in working out our English code of laws. St. Teresa loved his *Moralia* from the Book of Job : St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Bernard nearly knew it by heart. It is hardly possible to exaggerate the importance of his *Letters* to the student who aims at an accurate insight into the sixth century with clear ideas as to the role of the papacy in feudal Europe. The Protestant reader finds in

his *Dialogues* already full-grown and rampant that popery which he has been taught to believe a superstitious overgrowth of the Middle Ages. For Gregory entertains Peter with stories "of monks and nuns and anchorets, of monastic poverty, of vows of chastity which it was sacrilege to break even for marriage, of clerical celibacy, of the invocation of saints, of pilgrimages and shrines and relics and miracles, of the Sign of the Cross, and of Holy Water, of purgatory, of 'sacrifices of Masses' for the living and of trentals for the dead, of the Reservation of the Blessed Sacrament, of the primacy of the Roman See, and of the superiority of the successor of St. Peter above all bishops."

In this appreciation of the *Dialogues*, from the pen of Father Coleridge, S.J., we may append the terse panegyric pronounced by Bossuet upon the achievements of St. Gregory :

"This great Pope subdued the Lombards, saved Rome and Italy though the emperors gave him no help, repressed the upstart pride of the patriarchs of Constantinople, enlightened the whole Church by his teaching, governed both East and West with vigour and humility, and gave to the world a perfect pattern of pastoral rule."

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